

The Art of Persuasion, Metaphor and Desire

Master of Arts by Project
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I certify that:

- a) except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone (see *Section 16.0*);
- b) the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;
- c) the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;
- d) No editorial work, paid or unpaid, has been carried out by a third party;
- e) ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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During the course of this project I discovered just how difficult it is to write about one's own work and I have really struggled with this. When I commenced this project I had no conception that it would take me to China.

I feel as if I have been on a long, difficult journey in a new land without a guidebook, signage or a common language. In China this was literally true; it is a journey which has taken me to new places, new people, new ideas and a new conceptual framework and process for my art making. I am grateful for this experience - I hope that in some small way my ideas and art work may encourage others to undertake such a journey.

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Introduction and Summary

This art project is an investigation into the relationship between the representation of women in billboard advertising and women's health and wellbeing. The impact of advertising images on the formation of female concepts of self-worth and self-empowerment are given specific attention. The project's title *The Art of Persuasion, Metaphor, and Desire* is a visual, metaphorical, and psychological reference to the appropriation of female private space by billboard advertising in a contemporary urban (both western and eastern) context.

My objective was to create a body of work, which reflects a personal response to gender issues in advertising by creating an alternative iconography. The final installations are reflective works, which physically and metaphorically deconstruct and re-imagine the layering of meaning and content in contemporary representations of women.

It is my intention to reflect, re-structure, re-present and re-imagine visual and structural metaphor in advertising. I have done this by deconstructing and then reconstructing my own photographs of billboards, posters and the urban environment in Australia and China. I have endeavoured to create new layered metaphors, ambiguity and juxtapositions that ask reflective questions of the viewer rather than provide answers. I hope this imagery will elicit individual responses from the viewer, as these responses are crucial to the perception of these works as critical interventions.

A quote from a recognised and exceptionally gifted and successful woman is very relevant to this project and illustrates how important our perception of personal attractiveness is. As Etcoff, 2009 writes,

When Eleanor Roosevelt was asked if she had any regrets, her response was a poignant one: she wished she had been prettier. It is a sobering statement from one of the most revered and beloved of women [in America], one who surely led a life with many satisfactions. (P)

Initially it was envisaged that the project's focus would be a contemporary western context. However, as the project evolved it became evident that both a potent symbol and a comparative focus was needed as an allegorical counterbalance. Through a process of applied research, the project's focus was narrowed and a decision was made to

introduce high heel shoes, explicitly stilettos, as a potent gender symbol into the imagery. At this point, an immediate and significant counterpoint became evident in the *Lotus Shoe*. In a Western and Eastern context, the history of shoes is a political, social and economic class history.

The symbolism of the female shoe gradually emerged as the crucial visual and psychological metaphor for this project. Chinese and European shoes, with their historic references offered a rich and multi-layered perspective on culturally defined gender norms. The project is not about shoes but it is concerned with shoes as a metaphor for gender construction; therefore, the research into the Chinese and European history of shoes is generic rather than explicit. Research was undertaken in Australia and in China. The stilettos' significance is as a universal female sign and icon. Its visual and metaphorical function, in the final works, is as a potent signifier of culturally constructed identity and gender representation.

The rationale for the project is a body of research that indicates that women's attitudes toward their own bodies are worse after looking at thin media images. Young women, after looking at pictures of thin, idealised models are likely to experience lowered satisfaction with their own body and a rise in depression. (Cruise, 2007, p. 2)

Other research has found that reading fashion and beauty magazines is associated with wanting to lose weight and initiating diets and that "reading dieting advice in magazines was associated with skipping meals, smoking, vomiting and using laxatives in teenage girls". (Cruise, 2007, p. 2)

Based on this social research it was reasonable to think that women, when they look at a billboard, see themselves through the advertiser's eyes. This means that the dominant, consumer culture influences women's sense of self-worth and wellbeing.

My research questions focused on current critical theory in regard to gender and concepts of female identity and self-worth, the construction of metaphoric meaning in advertising, the appropriation of private and public female spaces as a significant issue in the contemporary context and the significance of the historic nexus between masculine gender and technology.

1. Project Parameters

1.1 Project Description

This project is an investigation into the relationship between the representation of females in billboard and public poster advertising in an urban context, and the formation of female concepts of self-worth and self-empowerment.

The project's title *The Art of Persuasion, Metaphor and Desire* is a visual, metaphorical and psychological reference to the appropriation of female private space by public poster and billboard advertising in the contemporary context. Specific attention is given to the use of visual metaphor in the advertising of feminine products and the representation of young women between 18 and 35 years of age.

My visual response to public advertising and the urban environment is significantly determined by my age, female gender and a feminist perspective and I make no apology for this. My objective was to create a body of work that reflects my personal response to contemporary advertising through a series of interventions with posters and billboards and to create an alternative iconography.

It is not the intention of this project to provide definitive answers on the influence, nature and seductive quality of advertising images or on their impact on female concepts of self-worth. In fact, though there is a body of empirical research on this question there is a lack of definitive answers. The sexualisation and objectification of children and teenage girls is now being researched and widely discussed in the media. But the sexualisation and objectification of women over 18 years of age does not merit the same attention or disquiet.

It is my intention, through the creation of an alternative iconography and a reflective body of work, to metaphorically expose layers of hidden meaning and content in the contemporary, public representation of women.

It is not my intention to be didactic – but rather to use irony and allegory to expose and critique the metaphoric layering of visual and textual meaning in contemporary advertising, though the research and the art work may be personally, conceptually and even artistically confronting.

It is my intention to reflect, re-structure, re-present and re-imagine visual and textual metaphor in advertising. I have done this by deconstructing and then reconstructing original photographs of billboards, posters and urban environments. I have digitally re-

imaged my photography to create equally complex visual metaphors in alternative juxtapositions with the objective of posing reflective questions rather than answers.

It is my expectation that this imagery will elicit individual and collective responses from the viewer and that this intersection is vital to the reading of the work.

Etcoff (2000) in *The Survival of the Prettiest: the Science of Beauty* offers two quotes from two recognised and exceptionally gifted and successful people which are very relevant to this project. Etcoff (2000) writes,

When Eleanor Roosevelt was asked if she had any regrets, her response was a poignant one: she wished she had been prettier. It is a sobering statement from one of the most revered and beloved of women [in America], one who surely led a life with many satisfactions. (p. 253)

This is not just a woman's lament as Etcoff's (2000) quote from Leo Tolstoy indicates,

I was frequently subject to moments of despair. I imagined that there was no happiness on earth for a man with such a wide nose, such thick lips, and such tiny gray eyes as mine ... Nothing has such a striking impact on a man's development as his appearance, and not so much his actual appearance as a conviction that it is either attractive or unattractive. (p. 253)

Leo Tolstoy may have been comforted, but then again maybe not, by Todosijević (2002) comments on Etcoff's argument. Etcoff (2000) argues that beauty is not an arbitrary feature but an essential, evolutionary survival mechanism and that our obsession with beautification should be seen as part of this evolutionary process. In other words, it is just human nature. Todosijević (2002) however refutes this and argues that there is no significant body of research to support Etcoff's contention.

In fact there is no major research that supports the hypothesis that those who are beautiful achieve more in life or are any richer, socially elevated or happier than those who are not culturally sanctioned beauties. Sadly, the voice of reason is lacking in the advertising beauty stakes to the detriment of many young women and probably always has been. The real evolutionary and contemporary issues are in all probability about gender power not beauty.

1.2 Cultural Context

Initially it was envisaged that the project's focus would be in a contemporary western context. However, as the project evolved it became evident that both a potent symbol and a comparative focus were needed as an allegorical counterbalance. Through a process of applied research,¹ the project's focus was narrowed and a decision was made to interpose high heel shoes, explicitly stilettos, as a potent gender symbol into the imagery. At this point, an immediate and significant counterbalance became patent in the Lotus Shoe and the history of Chinese foot binding.²

The symbolism of the female shoe then emerged as the crucial visual metaphor for this project. Chinese and European shoes, with their historic, known references offered a rich and multi-layered perspective on culturally defined gender norms.

The project is not about shoes but it is concerned with shoes as a metaphor for gender construction. Consequently, the research into the Chinese and European history of shoes is generic rather than explicit. Research was undertaken in Australia and in China and the stiletto's significance in the final works is as a universal female sign and icon. Its visual and metaphorical function is as a potent signifier of culturally constructed gender identity and public representation.

Billboards publicly reflect images of ourselves or rather, advertising's perspective on what a woman should be (the scale is monumental). The conception of this project was informed by research on women's attitudes toward their own bodies.

This research indicates that women's attitudes are influenced by advertising and that women become negative, depressed and more self-critical after looking at media images of thin women.

¹ Experimentation with original photographs, collage, digital montage and digital compilations.

² The term Lotus Shoe or Lotus Foot refers to "The Chinese custom of breaking and binding a little girl's feet [which] began over one thousand years ago. . . . Prince Li Yu, [is credited with initiating the use of the term] had a favourite woman in his concubine, who was a suburb dancer "Precious Thing" [who] toe danced [with bound feet] inside a six-foot high platform shaped like a lotus flower made of gold." (Lotus Shoe: History of Footwear, 2009, p. 1)

Reist (2007) writes,

In young teenage girls, looking at pictures of thin, idealised models is likely to cause lowered satisfaction with their body and a high state of depression. Reading fashion and beauty magazines are associated with wanting to lose weight and initiating diets. A five-year study found that reading dieting advice in magazines was associated with skipping meals, smoking, vomiting and using laxatives in teenage girls ... [these are] society's built in messages that you have to be thin and sexy to be acceptable. (P)

In a consumer culture social status is signified by possession. By possessing goods we achieve social status and cultural approval and our desire for social and cultural status (approval) compels us to consume. Currently, our understanding of what is culturally desirable (approved) is defined by the dominant male culture.

I contend that the adoption and deliberate re-enforcement of these principles by the advertising, popular media and fashion industry sectors represents a systematic and structured appropriation of female public and private cultural space. A cultural space that systematically requires women to adopt a persona, to see themselves in terms of possession and desire, effectively inhibits women's capacity to develop and sustain personal space, identity and self-worth. To be a young female in a consumer culture is to be like children, constrained, with a small face pressed to the glass to see the world but seeing only the world's conceits in your reflection.

All women are aware that coded cultural messages are embedded in advertising but to assume that there is and can be a neutral reading is to miss the point. Concepts of gender identity are not neutral and in advertising the visual layering of meaning is subtle and carefully constructed. I believe the intention is to reinforce gender concepts determined by the dominant, male culture as reinforcing these concepts guarantees that the company will sell products.

There are nonetheless alternative viewpoints. Nancy Etcoff (2000, para. 3) believes that criticism of advertising is unwarranted and argues that to suggest, "that men on Madison Avenue have Svengali-like powers to dictate women's behaviour and preferences, and can define their sense of beauty, is tantamount to saying that women are not only powerless but mindless". Anecdotally, this seems to be a popular view amongst young women and many of my students have expressed this opinion. They argue that

their interest in beauty and fashion gives them (sexual) power over men and that being concerned about such issues is silly.³

In order to respond to this perspective I revisited John Berger's (1979) *Ways of Seeing* for a balanced approach to critical analysis of advertising. Berger's concepts and process have informed my approach to the visual imaging in this project⁴.

1.3 Social Parameters

In this project the social research into the relationship between advertising and women's health and wellbeing focuses on self-injurious behaviours such as eating disorders, depression and suicide in girls 18 to 25 years of age.

Ewing and Reist's (2007) "Faking it & the Female Image in Young Women's Magazines" in *Australian Women's Forum* discussed the impact of advertising on women's self-esteem and succeeded in bringing these issues to the media's and the government's attention in Australia. It has not lasted, nor is there any discernable difference in advertising images. Thin bodies and youthful faces still predominate. As Ewing and Reist (2007) write,

Some authorities estimate that as many as one in five female students are bulimic. . . . When you look at the messages they are sold, perhaps it is not all that surprising that they are starving themselves to death. Research shows that many young women feel

³ My students frequently tell me that I sound just like their mothers. The message being that concerns about advertising and feminism belong to an era, which has passed, and these ideas are no longer relevant.

⁴ Berger, (1972) writes,
To be born a woman is to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women is developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in her is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (p. 46)

disgusted by their bodies. Saying they have "low self esteem" is putting it mildly - they hate themselves. (P)

Anorexia, bulimia, over eating and dieting are considered to be indicative of an obsessive need, felt by many adolescent girls and young women, to attain socially sanctioned thinness (perfection). From this perspective there is perhaps no more potent symbol of female disempowerment in contemporary society than the anorexically thin girl or young woman.

The research published by Ewing et Al (2007) in "Faking It: The Female Image in Young Women's Magazines", established that excessively thin, sexualised and digitally enhanced images of women are linked to poor body image, depression, anxiety and eating disorders in young girls. This is disputed by the advertising industry but that the images contribute to self-harming behaviours and reduced academic and social performance is now well documented.

This was an important research finding and a starting point for this project and I surveyed the social networking sites and blogs to inform my artwork.

In conclusion, I stumbled across an article by Margolis (2007) in the Guardian that humorously illustrated the media's obsession with women's bodies. Margolis (2007) writes,

Kate's hot new "vibrancy" diet! Jade: lonely and comfort eating! Proof that Posh is losing her looks! Geri: post-baby saggy skin! Tyra Banks slim again! No, I haven't suddenly lost my mind. I've just come back from my local supermarket and noted down some random headlines from the covers of various "celebrity" news-based magazines that were for sale. . . . On and on they go, but the message is always the same: if you are female, know that you will be judged based on what you look like; expect to be objectified; and hope to receive external validation from others about your image, which will give you self-worth. (para. 1)

I think that says it all.

1.4 Cross Cultural Comparisons

I was in China in 2008 and 2009 for a five-month period on each occasion. Between my teaching duties and during a month long residency in Beijing on each occasion I was able to photograph the urban environment and billboards. The compilations in the final works are from original photographs taken in Nanchang, Beijing, Changsha and Shanghai. I also spoke with my Chinese teaching colleagues, students and local artists about the project and undertook local research. I acquired some original Lotus Shoes for my project and spoke to a woman at the Dirt Market involved in the contemporary Lotus Shoe Craft Movement. This complimented my urban photography in Australia.

The opening up of China over the last thirty years and the emergence of the new “Super China” is significant and the ‘Super China’ concept is reflected in the scale of the final works. The emergence of consumerism as the dominant culture and the relationship of this emergence to the decline of community, social and traditional cultural values in China parallels the post-war consumer experience in Australia.

The sublimation now evident in China of the values of socialism to market driven values is changing personal and national signifiers of self-worth for the Chinese people and particularly for women. In urban areas, advertising to young women now promulgates the same obsession with thinness, dieting and fashion as it does in Australia. However, there is significantly less discussion and research available on this issue in China than in the west. In fact consumerism is considerably more ‘in your face’ in China than in Australia.

1.5 Research Questions

I responded to the following four research questions:

- a) What is the current critical theory concerning gender and the concepts of female identity and self-worth?
- b) How are image and text perceived by respondents to the WLOG⁵ research as intrinsic to the construction of metaphoric meaning in advertising?
- c) To what extent is the appropriation of private and public female spaces perceived to be a significant issue in the contemporary context?
- d) To what extent is the historic nexus between masculine gender and technology significant in the contemporary representation of women in advertising?

⁵ A WLOG or BLOG is a contraction of “web log” - a simplified website used by an individual or a group to self-publish an on-line journal or diary and/or to disseminate personal, political and social commentary, criticism and/or opinion. Blogs are interactive allowing readers to “post” text, images or video to the site. On-line entries are referred to as “postings” and appear in chronological order. “You Tube” and “Face Book” are well know blogs and due to the proliferation of “blogs”, they are now referred to as “social networking sites”.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Parameters

Initially, as already indicated, I envisaged this project as an investigation into the representation of women in public billboard and poster advertising in the contemporary western context. The specific concern was to be the relationship between female concepts of self-worth and empowerment and the significance of the appropriation of private female spaces by public advertising.

During the first year while working on a parallel process of applied research and academic research it quickly became apparent that the original research focus needed to be narrowed and that unifying metaphors or symbols were needed to critically address the relationship between advertising and concepts of female self-worth and self-empowerment.

This was necessary both to focus the project and to make the body of social and psychological research material on women's health and wellbeing, which is extensive, manageable.

Significantly, early research indicated a correlation between advertising images, eating disorders and self-worth in girls and young women. This is not supported by all researchers but it is a significant enough finding, in the research literature, to be a valuable reference point for this project.

The decision to narrow the research parameters and to focus on the relationship between eating disorders, advertising and self-worth in young girls and young women rather than the generic "women" was then informed by the direct testimony of girls and young females from a number of "pro-anna" and "pro-bulimia" websites.¹ The existence of an underground network of these websites and a proliferation of alternative websites discussing these issues also meant that the on-line blog research is an important part of this project.

The western context is defined here as urban Australia and after photographing in both Sydney and Perth a decision was made to focus on Melbourne, as there was no discernable difference in the content, location or actual billboard advertising in the other cities. In fact, billboard advertising of feminine products across Australia is

¹ These terms refer to anorexia and bulimia as a lifestyle choice.

homogeneous. Thus, Melbourne's urban environment and billboards metaphorically stand in for the western context.

As my applied research progressed, I became increasingly aware that any alternative representation of females and billboards, no matter how deconstructed, still referenced the original advertising and still tended to reinforce rather than critique the message. This was a significant dilemma if in critiquing the representation of women in advertising the resulting artwork reinforced negative stereotypes.

This insight led me to consider using an object and/or metaphor as a stand-in for the female form and/or billboard in my art work and that this stand in needed to encapsulate the beauty, seductive qualities and desirability of advertising while referencing obvious and known detrimental health issues for young females.

After considering a range of historic, constrictive underwear and other feminine apparel I settled on the "Lotus Shoe" and the "Stiletto" as appropriate metaphorical objects in my work: one that is seen at a distance from the western context and one that is a universal consumer object. These objects are a critical focus in my work and act as deconstructed and re-imagined ironic female icons without reinforcing negative cultural values or body images. To emphasise this "Lotus Shoe" appears in the Australian urban context and the "Stiletto" in the Chinese urban context.

2.2 Analytical Framework

Berger (1972) in *Ways of Seeing* wrote of the social construction of gender in the following terms:

To be born a man or a woman in any society is more than a simple biological fact. It is a biological fact with social implications. Women constitute a distinct social group and the character of that group, long neglected by historians, has nothing to do with feminine "nature". "Gender" is the term now widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature. (p. 46)

The theoretical framework which informs the artwork in this project is grounded in the concept that "gender" is culturally determined by the dominant culture and that historically girls and women have been redefined, represented, valued and channelled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways.



Figure 2.1 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, c. 1638, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 June 2005 from <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/JudgementOfParisPeterPaulRubens2.html>

Berger goes on to discuss art history and later advertising in the context of his theory of "the gaze" as the process by which gender is defined and reinforced and of which he writes:

'Woman' is a creation of the masculine gaze. Before we can see how women thought of themselves and of their relations with men, we must find out how they were seen by men. The masculine conception of woman gave rise to idealizations and norms that strongly influenced the behaviour of women, who lacked the power to challenge the male view of their sex. (p. 46)

Berger refers to Rubens' *The Judgement of Paris* as an early example of the power of the "male gaze". The men who remain fully clothed, are looking upon three naked women whose cultural role and social behaviour is physically and metaphorically captured in their "male" gaze. (See Figure 2.1)

In the contemporary context, it is not unreasonable to hypothesise that the representation of women in advertising billboards is culturally constructed, presented and defined by the male gaze and that women and girls are still conditioned to see themselves from this objectified perspective. That is, they see themselves with male eyes. If this is their basis of comparison, it follows that girls and young women will attempt to reflect and emulate the images of ultra young and ultra thin women in advertising which permeates our culture.

Public consumption of billboard advertising comes at a cost. These images are not neutral but layered with metaphorical meaning which subliminally define the lens through which women perceive themselves. The billboard is a social mirror and I treat the billboard as such in my project works. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. In accordance with Berger's analogy of the mirror, my billboard re-imaged billboards refer to the psychological state of simultaneously being both the "surveyor" and the "surveyed". Thus, do we see ourselves? Berger (1972) writes,

To be born a woman has to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women is developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. However, this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. . . . And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (p. 46)

When we consider Berger's analogy in conjunction with the often passive representation of women in advertising, then the psychosocial conundrum of the watcher and the watched becomes clearer. It also explains why women often judge themselves and their physical appearance so harshly.

In Figure 2.2 Mary Cassatt's *Mother and Child* the child looks into a mirror which she holds but which, significantly, the Mother, as the child's primary role model, also holds and, again, significantly the Mother's image holding the mirror and the girl seated on her knee is also reflected in profile in the larger mirror. We know that the girl sees her own image, but to again quote Berger, what the young girl sees in the mirror is not her own reflected image, but that of the viewer looking at her. She is thus looking at herself being looked at.

Berger also comments on the rosette or sunflower worn by the Mother as a symbolic of the bestowing of social favour. "In the context of the domestic world of the early twentieth century, the sunflower would follow the patriarch of the family. As the observer of the painting we become the husband/father." (Berger, 1972 p. 47 - 48)

The pinning of rosettes on young debutantes and women, a practice which continues in contemporary society in a welter of contexts, can be seen as metaphor for the public bestowing of personal or cultural favour. In contemporary western and eastern society that favour is still mediated by the dominant male culture. Laura Mulvey, in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in *Visual and Other Pleasures* illustrates the context of the contemporary gaze by discussing an image of Katie Harman.² (See Figure 2.3)



Figure 2.2 Figure 2.2
Mary Cassatt, *Mother and Child*, c. 1908
colour photography.
Photograph. Retrieved 12
March 2005
<http://employees.oneonta.edu>



Figure 2.3 Katie Harman
Miss America, 2002,
colour photograph. Retrieved
12, March 2005 from
<http://www.askmen.com>

² Laura Mulvey approaches her analysis of gender power from a comparative, narrative perspective. This analogy is equally valid when considering the public nature of billboard advertising. Mulvey writes, "The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle . . . he/(she) projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the (female's) erotic look". (Mulvey, 2008, p. 20)

In Figure 2.3 Kate Harman, Miss America 2002, is posing for the cameras. She is there to be looked at and she instinctively knows the camera pose and “the look” she is expected and required to project. She is thin, blond, with no discernable body hair, her teeth are whiter than white and orthodontically perfect. She projects excitement, gratitude and awareness that this moment represents the ultimate in male approval. She watches herself being watched. Mulvey directly references Berger’s analysis when she writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is style (sic) accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey, 2008, p.20)

Mulvey’s choice of the Katie Harman’s image is effective because it illustrates the singularity of gender representation in advertising and film. Film and advertising photography has become society’s ultimate billboard, in which female images are presented, re-presented and re-structured within the determining consumer gaze. The active/passive nature of being photographed/surveyed means the camera is the ascendant metaphor for the determining gaze in our contemporary, consumer culture. (Mulvey, 2008, p. 19)

To be photographed has become an obsession with young girls. Think You Tube. It is apparent that camera phones, digital cameras and social networking sites have inadvertently become complicit in the cultural construction of female identity in contemporary society.

Berger’s and Mulvey’s analysis, concepts and discussion of the representation of women in film and the popular media formed the analytical framework for the critique of advertising, the applied research and the final works in this project.

The concept of the camera as an ascendant metaphor for the cultural gaze is very important in this project.

2.3 Photography and Source Material

The source material for this project is a series of over 2000 original photographs taken by the artist over a four year period in Melbourne and China. In Australia the urban environment of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth was photographed and in China the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Nanchang and Changsha were photographed.

The Lotus Shoes and Western shoes are a combination of original photographs taken by the artist and downloaded copyright free images from Google Images. Images have only been reproduced from an article if they were accessible through Google.

All the urban photographs were taken within a ten kilometre radius of the GPO or city centres and focused on billboards and retail advertising in central business districts, technical or industrial complexes and/or along major bus or train transport routes.

In Australia the photography was film and commercially developed. The photographs and/or negatives were then scanned (1200 dpi) into the computer for digital post-production. A digital camera was used for documentation.

In China a low resolution digital (7.2 mega pixels) and video camera was used exclusively to differentiate and contrast the China images with those taken in Australia. The fuzzy, low resolution China images are an appropriate analogy for the rapid economic growth and even faster urban re-design (Where did that shop go? It was here last night) which is a feature of all Chinese cities. Fuzzy edges are also a great metaphor for the rampant consumerism in China.

The difference in light, resolution and image quality resulting from the use of film and digital images is intended to be a contrasting cultural metaphor in the final works. The digital imaging was done in Photoshop.

2.4 Literature Review and Critical Theory

A literature review was undertaken to identify current research on gender and female identity. This includes the representation of women in advertising and the construction of meaning and the extent to which the appropriation of private and public female spaces is perceived as a significant issue in the contemporary context. The nexus between the representation of females in advertising, specifically billboards and posters and the formation of concepts of self-worth and self-empowerment was investigated.

Feminist theory has contributed and continues to contribute to our understanding of the cultural construction of gender and there is a notable uniformity of thought on this issue. My research responded to the project's research questions.

a) What is the current critical theory in regard to gender and the concepts of female identity and self-worth?

In response to the first question, contemporary critical thinking supports the concept of gender identity as being socially constructed and socially mediated by the dominant male culture in both western and eastern contexts. As Bartky (1998) writes: “We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms, which surface as so many styles of the flesh.’” (p. 64)

Bartky discusses how in the contemporary context gender power is now centred in institutions and corporations and that this “becomes internalised by our bodies and our minds . . . [and] the subject knows that she is controlled in both mind and body by the many institutions that she is exposed to. She comes to internalise these disciplinary structures and ends up policing herself.”³ (p. 115)

To paraphrase Bartky (1998), there are three institutionalised practices which define the concept of what she describes as the “artifice of femininity” in our contemporary, consumer society. These are body shape and size, physical “comportment” (demeanour) and the use of the body as an ornamental surface. These attributes are mediated by “ideals of dieting, exercise, plastic surgery, the way women take up space, sit, walk, compose their facial expressions, smile, touch, etc. and physical enhancement through makeup, jewellery, clothes, care of the skin and hair.” (p. 105)

There are no surprises in this analysis as most women are aware and believe themselves to be voluntarily participating in these practices. Standards of dress and ornamentation change seasonally and young women particularly spend a significant portion of their disposable income on clothing and beauty products. However, as Bartky (1998) also notes, women never seem to be able to be “attractive enough or measure up to society’s (men’s) standards [and] even the successful practitioner of this regime doesn’t gain power or respect.” (p.111)

³ Examples given include government, schools, hospitals, the military, factories, prisons, business corporations and references to consumerism. (p. 115)

The relationship between this gender perspective, contemporary advertising and the numbers of girls and young women who feel trivialised by institutions, socially inferior and somehow deficient is important to this project.⁴

In the contemporary context, feminist theory has become an interdisciplinary field which explores the concept of gender in relation to class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and cultural context or location. However, as a body of research, it uniformly refers to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities and not to the state of being male or female in its entirety. The relationship of gender to the formation of identity and, therefore, concepts of self-worth and empowerment is still linked to the nature and exercise of social and political power in western and eastern societies.

However, contemporary gender theory did pose some difficulties in this project. As this project seeks to identify global parallels in women's experience of advertising and consumerism, the concept that this approach is not consistent with current feminist concepts of racial, cultural and ethnic diversity was a concern. A racially and ethnically specific gender theory, while it may not directly exclude cross cultural comparisons implies that any attempt to identify common, cross cultural gender experiences is problematic and may not be valid. It is seen as important to consider women's gender experience in explicit cultural and ethnic contexts. The nature of diversity is such that it means there can be no generalised, common experience of femininity across racially and ethnically diverse groups or cultures. This contemporary gender concept runs counter to the cross-cultural parameters of this project.

I was also concerned, (as in researching this project I found frequent references which suggested that; contemporary feminist theory is at an impasse) that "the project of reformulating concepts of self and social identity is thwarted by an association between identity and oppression and victimhood" (Weir, 2008, pp. 110 – 133).

Kristeva (1982) offers an effective response to the above arguments and her concepts were important in establishing and validating cross-cultural connectivity in this project.⁵

⁴ In spite of my anecdotal experience, in conversations with young female students in Australia and China who consider feminism to be passé, it is not. The need for feminist analysis and perspectives has not diminished and in respect to young women's health and wellbeing, it may be increasing. Indeed, I believe the growth of global consumerism, in western and eastern societies is the strongest argument for the application of critical social analysis to the representation of girls and young women in advertising.

Julia Kristeva developed a feminist theory of psychoanalysis, in which she formulated the concept of the semiotic and abjection as the process by which identity is formed in young girls.⁶ The extent to which a daughter develops a subjective, objectified view of herself is directly related to the extent to which the daughter excludes or abjects her mother as an appropriate social/cultural model. Kristeva contends that that process by which women form their identity in patriarchal cultures is the result of a semiotic and abjection process. This identification process is a mirror of the way societies are structured and argues that patriarchal cultures must continue to reject and abject the maternal/female to maintain their power and continue to exist. This process is well documented and equally valid in all patriarchal cultures (which Australia and China are) and is an effective foil to the argument that; understanding concepts of self-worth and identity cannot be debarred from an understanding of concepts of female based experience/s of cultural oppression.

On reflection, I realised that this is an art project not an academic argument. The project is concerned with complex relationships which do have a cross cultural context, do relate to gender and identity, the artifice of femininity, the nature of cultural power and issues around women's health and well being and that this is a legitimate social concern. It is not thwarted by the need to acknowledge and detail ethnic and racial diversity or an "association between identity and oppression and victimhood". (Weir, 2008, pp. 110 – 133)

In actuality the "association between identity and victimhood" comes from a medical, not social model and specifically from studies relating to women's mental health. And, historically, women who evince depression, self-injurious behaviours, social rebellion, issues with male authority and sexual dysfunction have been labelled as hysterical and/or mentally ill. So from this standpoint these associations are valid.

It is my contention that this project is strengthened by these cross cultural associations as the experience of gender, identity and contemporary concepts of

⁵ Kristeva, developed her theories by studying other patriarchal cultures one of which was China. See Kristeva, Julia. 1997. *About Chinese Women*. London: Boyars

⁶ The semiotic refers to the pre-mirror stage of development (instinctive, emotional) in Lacan and abjection refers to the rejection of the mother and her values by the daughter. The cultural distance between a daughter and a mother or mother figure reflects the daughter's level of independence from traditional values. See Kristeva, Julia. 1982, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press

femininity will align, at some point for some women in all cultures, irrespective of ethnic or racial diversities. This is due to the emergence of global consumerism which is and will redefine institutionalised cultural power in all societies.

The linking of female dissatisfaction, disobedience or rebelliousness with illness is a normative cultural response which still occurs today.⁷ Hysteria has traditionally been used to either silence or marginalise lower class, peasant or gypsy women or groups of women since the second century in Europe. This was most prevalent after the Reformation when the Catholic Inquisition was at its height when thousands of women with hysteria (a sign of the devil) were tortured and burnt at the stake as witches. The most well known incidence of group hysteria was the Salem Witch Trials and burnings in 1692. Figure 2.1 illustrates the practice of burning witches at the stake.

For the upper class women the medical diagnosis of hysteria has also been used since the second century. The word comes from the Latin “*hystericus*, meaning ‘of the womb,’ and from the Greek *hysterikos*, meaning suffering in the womb”. A malfunction in the uterus was considered to be the cause of hysteria and women who were unable to conceive were commonly diagnosed as hysterics.

To paraphrase Maines, (1998), female hysteria was consistently associated with sexual dysfunction or deprivation and in a colloquial sense still is.

Hysteria was identified in Europe in the second century by Galen, a Greek physician who noted that hysteria was a characteristic condition of “virgins, nuns, widows, spinsters and, occasionally, married women.” The prescribed treatment was pelvic (vaginal) massage by a midwife.

In Victorian England, it was thought hysteria in “civilised women” was caused by the stress of modern life which made them susceptible to reproductive disorders. It was estimated that “75% of women suffered from hysteria”; however this needs to be considered in the context of the prescribed treatment which was manual stimulation by a doctor “until the patient experienced a ‘hysterical paroxysm’ now know as an orgasm.



Figure 2.1 Anon, Untitled, c.1544, black & white etching, Photograph. Retrieved 12 May 2008 from <http://marinni.livejournal.com/389807.html>

⁷ A friend and several work colleagues have all reported the experience of being told by their husbands, when they initiated a divorce that they were mentally ill and needed to see a psychiatrist.

By the 1850s hydrotherapy devices were available at Bath and in 1870 a clockwork-driven vibrator became available for doctors. In 1873, the first electromechanical vibrator was used in asylums to treat hysteria. By 1918, the electric vibrator was available for home use and the medical diagnosis of hysteria lapsed.

The formation or malformation of women's identity and self-worth are treated as mental health issues in contemporary society and, therefore, the exclusive province of mental health professionals. The theoretical framework for research into self-injurious behaviours in girls and young women, diagnosis and treatment is the medical model and, as already noted, the concept that the patriarchies are a significant factor in the formation or mal-formation of women's sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-empowerment is not considered.

Again, historically, women (wives) who have "escaped" from husbands and, thus being empowered, developed "social/culturally independent" positive identities are still designated "outsiders" and, therefore, socially isolated, perceived as a threat and denigrated as "men haters" or "emotionally unstable", primarily because they are no longer owned, manageable property or under male control.

It is no surprise that patriarchy is concerned with power and the preservation of patriarchy's power and that gender and sex and/or sexuality are, therefore, about power in society. Male power, as the social and cultural arbitrator of female gender identity is still paramount, though the nature of this subservience, as already discussed, is learned from the mother.

But, it is surprising, that after reading the research on self-injurious behaviours and testimony of girls and young women on a number of pro-anna and pro-bulimia blogs (which illustrated the extremes of self-mutilation these women are prepared to go to, to have control and autonomy in their own lives) that the medical model, rather than a social/behavioural model is still preferenced. As a female, to be reduced to mutilating your own body because it represents the only thing in your life over which you have some control is victimhood, but it is also a rebellion, but one in which the social and cultural anger and frustration has been turned inward.

To summarise: current critical gender theory does see identity as being culturally constructed and socially mediated by the dominant male culture. But, critical opinion on the extent to which it is valid to argue a commonality and connectivity in women's experience is divided. The contemporary emphasis on the diversity of women's gender experiences based on race and ethnic diversity rejects the concept of commonality in

female experience. There are also some concerns about the linking of gender to mental health issues. However, the global nature of institutionalised power in consumer cultures pre-empt these arguments.

Issues relating to the representation of women in advertising and mental health issues are discussed in detail in the section on research outcomes, but as a theoretical framework I made a conscious decision to use a social analysis and not the medical model in this project.

b) How are image and text perceived by respondents to the WLOG research⁸ as intrinsic to the construction of metaphoric meaning in advertising?

The research on the relationship between image and text and the extent to which this relationship is intrinsic to the construction of metaphoric meaning in advertising is comprehensive and conclusive. The relationship between text and image is intrinsic to our understanding of the message. The web blog research indicates that participants and respondents on these sites do understand advertising strategies but it is difficult to ascertain the depth of this understanding.

That, the average person understands the nature, purpose and strategies of advertising are not disputed in the literature. However, the assumption that the average person can therefore make an informed choice is questionable, as social context and exposure to media education in schools varies. Again, I found no credible measure of the depth of that understanding or the “reality” of the informed choice scenario.

However, John Berger and George Layoff’s critiques and marketing texts on contemporary advertising are unequivocal in emphasising that effective advertising is persuasive advertising. This position, supported by market research, indicates that the argument about the public’s capacity to make an informed decision is seen as facetious by the advertising industry. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003 , p. 39)

The industry agrees that persuasion sells and effective persuasion relies on the structuring of metaphoric meaning visually and texturally. As O’Shaughnessy (2003) writes,

Effective advertising is always persuasive advertising; and advertising that does not seek to persuade (relying, for example, on attention getting or repeated exposure effects alone) is really missing an opportunity. In a competitive situation, those who persuade best are those most likely to win. Persuasion is always important, even where the competition is inept. (p. ix)

O’Shaughnessy (2003) goes on to discuss the importance of “social attachments (culture, reference groups, social class, experiences) and perspectives (current beliefs and values) of the target audience”. He does this in the context of “persuasive advertising

⁸ The Web Log (WLOG) research refers to the social networking, individual and organisational blogs (including the pro-anna and pro-bulima lifestyle sites), government sites and interactive women’s health and welfare sites.

content” and the effective use of ‘association’ in persuasive appeals”. This is a marketing text for advertising executives and as such illustrates all of Lakoff and Johnson’s metaphoric principles. (p. iii)

Lakoff and Johnson’s description of types of metaphors and their cultural function are important in this project. To paraphrase Lakoff (2003) metaphors can be classified as structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors are conceptual in origin defining how we see ourselves in relation to others and relate to cultural, social and class conceits.

Oriental metaphors are directional metaphors - “happy is up, sad is down” which assign social and cultural values to objects. In advertising, these metaphors are associated with upward mobility or acquiring desirable personal assets such as “that sexy black dress”.

Ontological metaphors are defined as “time is money” or “bigger is better” or “life is a journey”. These conceptual metaphors refer to necessary items and limits as in not enough time, resources or consumer goods. The use of metaphor to conceptualise time is an important, structural principle in a consumer culture as the need to sell product is on going. Hence, the urgent nature of many advertising slogans – “Closing Down Sale” or “Last Chance to Buy” or “New Seasons Must Haves”.

Lakoff cites common metaphoric expressions used during a discussion or argument as examples of structural metaphors. Expressions such as; “argument is war; your claims are indefensible; he attacked every weak point in my argument; his criticisms are right on target; I demolished his argument; I have never won an argument with him and You disagree? Okay shoot”. (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 104)

This type of argument is postulated as if the protagonists are literally as well as metaphorically at war and this is Lakoff’s point – metaphor defines how we play our parts and our social, gender and cultural context defines the implied values.

Metaphor is a structural principle, which we intuitively understand at a conceptual level because it is part of our cognitive processes. We assign social, cultural and class values to advertising messages through the association of text and image from our own experience and with reference to our social, class and gender status. The extent to which we are aware of this structuring and are able to make an informed decision about our response to advertising is unclear. But, this is not the point – metaphor is an underlining principle in cultural structure and, as such it is so ubiquitous that we may lack the cognitive tools to read the underlying cultural structuring in advertising.

c) To what extent is the appropriation of private and public female spaces perceived to be a significant issue in the contemporary context?

In response to the question of appropriation of private and public female spaces as a significant issue in the contemporary context, I have explored current concepts of beauty and the commoditisation of women's images.

Candace Bergen commented in the 1960s that: "People see you as an object, not as a person and they project a set of expectations onto you. People who don't have it think beauty is a blessing, but actually it sets you apart." (Bergen, 1995, para 1)

The alternative view, as discussed by Wolf (1996) in "The Beauty Myth", sees contemporary concepts of beauty in western culture as a consumer commodity, culturally structured and presented, through advertising, to appropriate private and public female "identity" spaces.

The extent to which this is seen as a very significant issue, in respect to women's health and wellbeing, is contentious and the subject of on-going debate in the mental health field.

Wolf (1996) examines contemporary concepts of "beauty", which as a consumer commodity, place unrealistic demands and stresses on women to reflect back an idealised, culturally determined image of beauty. Wolf subtitled her work *How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* and she argues that beauty has become a judgement in western society - that is you either have it or you don't have it and this status impacts on the spheres of employment, culture, religion, sexuality, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery.

Wolf was one of the first feminist theorists to seriously discuss self-injurious behaviours such as eating disorders as a social, not a medical, issue and she has been systematically maligned as a result.

Wolf (2002) contends that women in Western culture are damaged by the pressure to conform to an idealized concept of female beauty - the "Iron Maiden" in modern society - and that the beauty myth is political, a way of maintaining the patriarchal system. It allows women to enter the labour force, but under controlled conditions. She also asserts that this system keeps women under control by the weight of their own insecurities.

Wolf (2002) writes,

The beauty myth is sometimes viewed as succeeding *The Feminine Mystique*, which relegated women to the position of housewife, as the social guard over women. In this sense, Wolf claims that public interest in a woman's virginity has been replaced by public interest in the shape of her body. (P)

There is an implicit concern that the western (and now eastern) cultural obsession with body shape cannot be ignored, as a contributing factor in the growth of self-injurious behaviours in women over the last thirty years. But, unfortunately, the continued emphasis on the medical model for both diagnosis and treatment does not currently permit social/cultural factors to be fully considered.

Current research on the impact of advertising on women's self-esteem does indicate that some women are depressed or react negatively when shown images of beautiful, slim women's bodies but the general conclusion is that it is only those women with existing low self esteem who are affected. The obvious issue here is that it is very difficult to find women who have not been previously exposed to this type of advertising and that their existing poor self-image has already been culturally influenced.

In respect to Wolf's research it is worth noting that the book was republished in 2002 with a new introduction by the author and Wolf was again attacked, this time by Christina Hoff Sommers, who criticised Wolf for publishing the claim that 150,000 women were dying every year from anorexia. Sommers claimed that the actual number is closer to 100, a figure which others, such as Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, claimed to be much too low. (DeeMarie, 2007, para. 3)

d) To what extent is the historic nexus between masculine gender and technology significant in the contemporary representation of women in advertising?

Historically, technology has been the preserve of the male and a signifier of male, gender based power. This was particularly significant when gender roles, western consumption and the home and work divide were paramount. Thus, historically as men controlled the technology they also controlled the representation of women in advertising – ensuring the maintenance and reinforcement of the status quo. There is a significant body of feminist research which discusses the nexus between gender power and technology and stresses that technology and the consumer/capitalist culture has ensured that patriarchal values are intrinsic to technology. This is now being questioned by contemporary feminist writers who are arguing “cyberfeminism conceives of the virtuality of cyberspace and the Internet as spelling the end of the embodied basis for sex difference and thus liberating for women.”

(Wajcman, 2006, p. 8)

The history of technology and the nexus with male power is not the concern of this project. However, the technology of advertising is and this technology is no longer automatically equated with male power as many women now work in the advertising, marketing and film and media industries. However, to assume that as and when technology comes into women’s hands and therefore control, this will liberate women from traditional gender stereotypes is misleading.

My contention is that it is not technology but the way technology is culturally and socially used that defines the nature of power in advertising and currently the representation of woman is still mediated by the “male gaze”. Though one would like to believe in the “transformative” impact, power and social equality of technology (specifically the internet) as argued by the Cyberfeminists. As Smitley (2004) comments contemporary feminists have “claimed that the Internet provided (sic) the technological basis for a new form of society that is potentially liberating for women” (para. 2) It is difficult to see this happening in a contemporary consumer culture. As Wajcman (2006) writes,

We are entering a new form of market capitalism rooted in technological invention and innovation, sometimes referred to as ‘Technocapitalism’, is widespread. Whatever the term used, such theories share an emphasis on intangibles, such as creativity and knowledge, being the core of capitalism, replacing raw materials and factory labour ...

[in which] the egalitarian image of creative knowledge work in the new economy is belied by employment trends marked by an increasing polarisation of jobs (Edwards and Wajcman 2005). Moreover ... the labour market is still clearly characterised by a hierarchal sexual division of IT skills and expertise. (p. 8)

That is not to say that we have new technologies with the same old social values; clearly cultural values have and do change in response to technological developments. In fact, as Wajcman also discusses social studies now see technology and society as “mutually constitutive” and technology is “understood as both a source and a consequence of gender relations.” (Wajcman, 2006, p. 16)

From a personal perspective I concede that woman’s increasing technological literacy may lead to new gender theories but it may equally lead to greater control by the dominant culture, consumerism. From my perspective, mastery of new technology is not important – it is the information that is important.

In contemporary society knowledge is power and the increasing technological literacy of women may prove to be historically, inconsequential. The real issue remains the ownership of knowledge product and, how and, in what ways will they seek to manipulate the technology to deliver the message, images and text to the consumer.

Historically, the gender of the worker was less relevant than the gender of the owner – and currently the knowledge/consumer society is owned and shaped from a male perspective. I am concerned that potentially the IT Industry will be the female sweatshop of the future.

2.5 Applied Research

Applied research is the term I use for the street photography and the experimental digital imaging, animation and video work I undertook as the crucial research process for this project.

My concern, in this process, was the primacy of the photographic image and the visual perception of coded social and cultural messages in billboard representations of girls and young women in an urban context. The visual relationship, metaphorical embedding and the mirrored reflection of these culturally sanctioned images to the physicality of the city, the architecture and the metaphorical construction of cultural values in contemporary urban environments was an empirical component of this research. As Coward (1984) writes,

Preoccupation with visual images strikes at women in a very particular way. For looking is not a neutral activity. Human beings don't all look at things in the same way, innocently as it were. In this culture, the look is largely controlled by men. Privileged in general in this society, men also control the visual media. The film and television industries are dominated by men, as is the advertising industry. The photographic profession is no less a bastion of the values of male professionalism. While I don't wish to suggest there's an intrinsically male way of making images, there can be little doubt that entertainment, as we know it is crucially predicated on a masculine investigation of women and a circulation of women's images for men. (p. 75)

As indicated, my research and analysis was informed by the following interrelated frameworks; John Berger's concepts of the male gaze; the concept of surveyor and the surveyed; the dialectic of active/passive representations of women in the media and advertising; a feminist perspective on the social construction of gender and contemporary concepts of "beauty" as a consumer commodity.

I applied the analytical tools and socialisation process identified and discussed by Bartky (1988) in her essay *Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*, in *Feminism and Foucault*. (pp. 61-86)

Bartky's concern is the contemporary process of socialisation of girls and young women, in the context of the (post) modernisation of patriarchy which is calculated to elicit a body of behaviours which are recognisably feminine. Bartky (1998) writes,

We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and re-enacting received gender norms, which surface as so many styles of the flesh. . . that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine. (p.64)

Bartky identifies the three components of this culturalisation process; firstly the production of a physical body whose size, shape and weight are pre-defined; secondly, a process of socialisation to ensure a set of behaviours pre-determined as identifiably feminine and, finally, the cultural training to develop an "objectified body" which is appropriately decorated or "ornamented" in accordance with culturally normative values. The description of this "socialisation process" offers an insight into the way images are physically and metaphorically constructed in advertising. Women's advertising has a repetitive, recognisable repertoire of gestures, postures and movements that complement the ornamented surface of women's bodies.

2.6 Comparative Research

The objective of the comparative research was to establish common and disparate aspects of critical feminist thinking in China and the West. As the central metaphor of this project is shoes, both western high-heels and the Lotus Shoe, specific attention was given to these aspects of feminist thought.

Clearly, the history of western female footwear and the eastern female foot-binding share a common social origin, in that, historically gender was structured by the dominant culture and not biologically determined. However, recent revisionist thinking and publications in China are now rejecting the western feminist perspective based on the contention that the west has misrepresented traditional practices such as foot binding in China and genital cutting in Africa and those western concepts of female subjectivity cannot be applied to Chinese or African women. This presents some difficulties, as in the ritualistic and fetishistic parallels of west and east De Beauvoir's dictum that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one" is actualised through a communally sanctioned process of physical alteration. (Sieber, 2005, p. 142)

In respect to foot binding, the historic nexus with sexual veneration, sexual fetish and sexual control is acknowledged in current Chinese writings. It is not developed as part of any gender theory. Instead, arguments that stress the communal nature of the collective undertaking (foot binding) - involved female peers and female elders alike is postulated. Sieber (2005) also notes that it is argued that a western analysis denies the affective solidarity of the female participants that the practice engendered.

From a western, feminist perspective the involvement of women in the process of socialisation is not a counter argument to culturally mediated gender construction but an innate part of the process. Nor, as is sometimes claimed, is the concept of physical pain as morally cleansing foreign to western philosophy. The Jesuits offer a notable example of educated self-flagellation as a spiritual, ritualistic practice in the west.

In this regard Sieber's (2005) contention that the physical pain of foot binding was considered a morally productive process that prepared the young girl for the 'exigencies' of adult life is credible. In fact, the concept that the female body was a "somatic arena for socio-moral self-cultivation [and] that foot binding created the ideal Confucian woman who worked diligently with her hands and body" is a valid argument in support of the cultural construction of gender rather than the reverse. (pp. 142 -147)

Culturally, small feet were highly prized and if a young girl was to make a good marriage then the smaller the feet the greater the prospects. The inflicting of pain by the

mother, (the girls toes were repeatedly broken and folded under her foot from the age of two), or the suffering of the daughter were not a social choice it was a necessity. As Wang, (2000) writes, “the public evaluation of foot size [illustrates] that subjection to these somatic regimens was neither voluntary nor optional” (p. 19-23)

The current need to refute the practice of foot binding as an example of culturally sanctioned or patriarchal violence against women is not surprising in the context of China’s emergence as a “super consumer economy”. There is a strongly expressed need, in art and academic circles, for China to be seen through Chinese rather than western eyes and to be seen positively. Therefore, it is to be expected that the history of foot binding will be revised and re-contextualised.

However, for Ko (2001) to relegate Lotus Shoes and foot binding to the governance of historical documents and to claim that, actually the feet were not as small as the shoes (it was clever design that gave an illusion of smallness) is a denial of the legitimacy of women’s narratives. (pp.195 -197) And, for Wang (2002) to write ecstatically about the intricacy of the shoes, the beauty of the tapestry work and the regional differences in shoe design and embroidery in the provinces without reference to gender or social context is offensive. There is no doubt that as hand made objects Lotus Shoes were and are beautifully crafted objects and there is a thriving contemporary cottage industry in China based on the traditional craft of sewing and embroidering Lotus Shoes.

Nor does one doubt Wang’s (2002) literature based research that illustrates that both men and women have written lyrically in praise of bound feet and the “transcendent nature of female pride in the smallness of their bound feet” as women were trained to please. (p.48)

But for contemporary academic women authors to split the history of women’s craft and social networking from the history of domestic and gender based repression in China is an insult to the intelligence of contemporary women. Interestingly, Wang (2002) writes at one point that “the contradictory nature of Chinese society is manifested in the duality of bound feet as moral enforcement and erotic object, at once ugly and beautiful, repulsive and enticing, comic and tragic, weak and powerful.” (p. 48)

This is the real point of the practice and no amount of historic revision will change this.

The realisation that historically women made and embroidered their own shoes and gave them as gifts to other women in their networks is chilling. As is the knowledge that

from the 1850s, when the industrial manufacture of leather shoes began in Shanghai and Beijing, the factories made small western style shoes for the lotus footed women.

The factory workers were women, many of whom still had bound feet. The practice continued in the provinces until 1921, when it was abolished by the new Communist Government.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

3.1 A Social Research Framework

This project is an art response to social issues around advertising as they correlate to women's health and wellbeing. The theoretical framework for this project is grounded in social research as I felt it important to respond to actual social research findings, as opposed to generalised concerns about the impact of advertising on women's health and wellbeing. I have not undertaken independent quantitative and qualitative research but relied on published research from a number of sources and specifically from women's networking sites, forums and blogs on the internet. I have also reviewed government and non-government agencies, and ABS statistics to establish the documented impact of advertising on self-esteem and self-worth in young women in the 18 – 25 age groups. (ABS National Health Survey: Users' Guide, 2001)

It is important to acknowledge that the research findings cited represent social research which was not, necessarily, undertaken using feminist methodology. As a corollary I have chosen to interpret current research from a social, cultural and organisational perspective in the project's final art works. These allowed me to document and consider the nature of billboard images as a part of physical and social structure of the urban environment.

This approach mirrors the daily experience of women in contemporary consumer culture and acknowledges that women do assimilate and psychologically integrate stereotypical images in billboard advertising with their daily *latté*. Some of these young women may reject feminism, but this does not make advertising images neutral or acceptable simply because some young girls think the images are "cool". We should also remember that some young girls find stereotypic, sexualised advertising offensive and that contemporary females are not universally "non-feminist women and girls ... who actively reject and oppose feminist critiques as being both *passé* and no longer relevant in a contemporary, post-feminist society". (Millen, 1997, vol. 2, no 3)

If the intent of the final art works is to draw attention to subterranean facets of cultural structuring, myths and gender narratives without alienating viewers, this generic social perspective is effective. It is also consistent with Feminist Stand Point Theory which has its origins in Marxist theories: specifically the analysis of the relationship between economic class and gender.

3.2 The Application of Critical Feminist Standpoint Theory

I elected to approach this project from the critical perspective of Feminist Standpoint Theory, which has its origins in Marxist theories of social, cultural, class and economic oppression. Standpoint theory emphasises the importance of culturally determined gender roles in social oppression and that women, as an oppressed social and/or economic class, have the capacity to identify the nature of their oppression and by doing so will be able to see and understand their personal and cultural experiences more clearly. From this perspective, the role of consumerism as a significant agent in the social construction of gender roles and values is uncovered.

The adoption of a critical perspective, the women's point of view, was very important in this project. This perspective enriches the art works and they can then be a voice to culturally validate women's experience, women's narratives, social insights and cultural knowledge. Standpoint Theory is well suited to its feminine warrior role as it is concerned with gender, that is the feminine, and women's recognition of the cultural construction of gender stereotypes. The recognition of the legitimacy and equality of feminine knowledge is critical in this project. As Millen, (1997) writes:

It is a response to the patriarchal statement that feminine or female experience is an invalid basis for knowledge, by positing that it is in fact a more valid basis for knowledge because it gives access to a wider conception of truth via the insight into the oppressor ... [as] it privileges so-called feminine qualities - a holistic, integrated, connected knowledge as opposed to the analytically-oriented and masculine form of knowledge ... there exists a feminine conception of knowledge, which is intuitive, emotional, engaged and caring which has been excluded from the development of ideas about knowledge due to the exclusion of women's understandings from the [cultural] process of development. (Millen, 1997, vol. 2, no. 3)

It needs to be noted that Feminist Standpoint Theory is generally not considered current or even valid in a postmodern context. However, for this project it had the additional advantage of offering an analytical tool which recognises the cross-cultural commonality or community of women's experience irrespective of race, age, religion, or ethnicity and, as such, has potential "for political unity and the capacity to link a theory of knowledge to the political reality of women's lives." (Millen, 1997, vol. 2, no. 3)

This concept is not supported by McLennan (1995) who to paraphrase argues that the search for a “unitary notion of 'truth' about the world is impossible” and that the concept of a unifying gender experience is “partial, profane and fragmented ... [and] we should be constructing multiple discourses. (pp.391-409)

This is a position which has social validity, but it is also somewhat illogical. For McLennan to propose that the existence of diversity (“multiple discourses”) excludes or invalidates the commonality of women’s cross-cultural experiences is not sustainable. An acknowledgement of unity in experience does not diminish the uniqueness of individual life stories or narratives.

However, to deny commonality does undermine the potential for cross-cultural unity and this just may be the real point of the argument. Labelling the concept of commonality as unitary sets it in opposition and obscures the fact that even in the most advanced economies women are still economically, politically and socially disadvantaged as a result of inequities in pay and working conditions. Many more are being and will be diminished by the growth of global consumerism as the dominant culture in developing economies.

The acknowledgement of a shared female experience is evident online. Blogs chat rooms and social networking sites illustrate that the same consumer values, clothing and female commoditisation is occurring in both the western and the eastern cultures. Figure 3.1 and 3.2 illustrates that both Asian and western school girls adopt the ubiquitous YouTube raunchy poses and sexualised dress of young girls world wide.



Figure 3.1 Western School Girls, 2008, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://mayhem-chaos.net/photoblog>



Figure 3.2 Asian School Girls 2008, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.puremobile.ca>

Unfortunately, the current emphasis on plurality, while relevant in terms of equity and opportunity, is not a framework for social justice or cultural critique and as such may be a significant barrier to understanding women's life experiences and contemporary narratives.

I chose to return to an earlier feminist perspective for my applied research just as I chose to preference John Berger's early analytical framework, as I was concerned about the lack of a unified voice and the pluristic, theoretical framework in contemporary feminism. How can I as an artist and a female develop a critical understanding of gender and its relationship to consumerism, culture and social status without acknowledging a shared feminine perspective and a clear standpoint? See Figure 3.3 for a contemporary illustration of Berger's concept of the Gaze and a visual illustration of why a clear standpoint is required in the analysis of gender representation in advertising.

For this project, as an artist and a female I need a critical understanding of gender and its relationship to consumerism, culture, and social status in a cross-cultural context. I need to acknowledge that there is a shared common, east/west feminine perspective and I needed a clear, unambiguous standpoint. As Millen, (1997) writes: "On a practical level, do postmodernist ideas about the status of theory and of methods of inquiry rule out many ways of gathering knowledge which might have some political utility for the feminist project?" (Millen, 1997, vol. 2, no. 3)



Figure 3.3 Gucci, 2008, colour photography. Photograph.
Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://models.com/feed/?tag=gucci>

3.3 The Media, Gender, and Identity

As noted, historically the use of the term women is a term employed by feminists to refer to gender, which is culturally determined and to distinguish it from sex, which is biological. In the media and advertising this distinction is frequently and deliberately blurred to the point where a number of feminists now consider the gender/sex distinction to lack validity. See Figure 3.4 for advertising in which the male is in a position of sexual/cultural power.



Figure 3. 4 Fashion advertising, 2009, colour photograph.
Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008
from <http://www.cracked.com>

However, children, be they male or female, are demonstrably socialised in accordance with the existing cultural parameters for each gender.¹ That socialisation is significant in the formation of gender identity is not in dispute.

However, the extent to which socialisation is significant is disputed. Rubin, (1975) writes that:

Although biological differences are fixed, gender differences are the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave. Women are oppressed as women and “by having to be women” as such it is considered to be mutable and alterable by political and social reform that would ultimately bring an end to women's subordination. Feminism should aim to create a “genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love.” (p. 204).

¹ Mikkola (2008, para. 10) writes “When parents have been asked to describe their 24-hour old infants, they have done so using gender-stereotypic language: boys are describes as strong, alert and coordinated and girls as tiny, soft, and delicate. Parents' treatment of their infants further reflects these descriptions whether they are aware of this or not. Some socialisation is more overt: children are often dressed in gender stereotypical clothes and colours (boys are dressed in blue, girls in pink) and parents tend to buy their children gender stereotypical toys. They also (intentionally or not) tend to reinforce certain appropriate behaviors.”

This perspective has been reiterated by Haslanger, who concludes that differences in the behavior and attitudes in males and females are socially constructed as “gendered traits, like nurturing or ambition,” are the “intended or unintended product[s] of a social practice”. (Haslanger, 1995, p. 97)

Yet, as Mikkola (2008) writes in *Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender* (2008), which “social practices construct gender, what social construction is and what being of a certain gender amounts to are major feminist controversies” (para. 2.3) There is no consensus on these issues.

MacKinnon (1989) formulated a theory of sexuality which argues that it is the “sexual objectification of women which constructs the social meaning of



Figure 3.5 Swimwear Advertisement, 2009, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://irenebrination.typepad.com>

sex” and this occurs when women are seen and exalted as “sexual objects for the pleasure of men”.

In societies where masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity as sexual submissiveness, then gender is “created through the eroticization of dominance and submission ... the man/woman and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex” (p. 13)

Figure 3.5 is an example of the way women are presented as “willing” sex objects for the pleasure of men in advertising – thus normalising pornography.

The acceptance of a social concept of female sexuality means that gender is referenced to social factors and the female viewer of an advertising image has no choice but to reference this image to “the position one occupies in the sexualised dominance/submission dynamic ... as a result, genders are by definition hierarchical and this hierarchy is fundamentally tied to sexualised power relations. The notion of ‘gender equality’, then, does not make sense.” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 14)

This analysis is consistent with Feminist Standpoint Theory and frequent examples of the pairing of female eroticism, class, sexual submissiveness and male dominance is evident in contemporary advertising. This pairing is discussed in detail in a later chapter. A key component in the analysis of advertising is the presence of Berger’s “male gaze”

which can be considered to be conditioned by pornography and, as MacKinnon (1989) later postulates:

That both female and male sexual desires are defined from a male point of view . . . [and] pornography portrays a false picture of ‘what women want’ suggesting that women in actual fact are and want to be submissive . . . meaning that male dominance is a result of social learning and that this socialisation is an expression of power . . . females and males (roughly put) are socialised differently because there are underlying power inequalities. (p. 14)

The concept of sexual objectification, raunch culture and pornography is now well understood by the general public and has been widely discussed in the western media but only in respect to the sexualisation of children. An important report by Dr. Emma Rush (2006) argues that sexualisation in advertising over recent decades has resulted in,



Figure 3.6 Janders, kids' couture, 2007 colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 6 July 2008 from <http://stellasthoughtsonanything.blogspot.com>

A creeping normalisation of portraying young female models in poses that are inappropriately sexualised for their age, and that the fashions marketed to young girls are becoming more and more sexualised as well ... the report concludes that “sexualised images of children encourage pedophiles to see children as sexually available and encourage young girls to focus on their bodies.” (p. 2)

Figures 3.6 and 3.7 are illustrative of inappropriate fashion and product marketing to young children and inappropriately sexualised poses for their age.



Figure 3.7 Love Advertising, 2008, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.cracked.com>

Rush, (2007) also argued in *The Australian* that the department stores Myer and David Jones are contributing to the sexualisation of Australia's children by stocking items such as:

bra tops for pre-pubescent girls, lip gloss for toddlers and skimpy underwear designed to be worn by children [and that] it's part of a plan to sexualise Australian children, especially girls, for the sake of corporate profits, children are being posed like adults, photographed with come-hither expressions, and encouraged to see themselves as sexual when they are not. (p. 1)



Figure 3.8 Frangipani Rose shot used in Rush's Report, 2007 colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 11 December 2008 from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au>

Not everyone agrees and advertisers, manufacturers and some retail stores have taken issue with Rush's conclusions and press statements. Bone (2007) responded to Rush by arguing that:

It's time to correct the single most common misunderstanding about the sexualisation of children ... as little girls have been tottering around in their mothers' high heels, smearing on lipstick and nagging to have their ears pierced ever since these things were invented. Most don't know the meaning of the word sex. They are merely playing at being grown up. Most do not even know the meaning of sex. They are just playing at being grown-up (p. 2)



Figure 3.9 Advertising to tweens, used in Rush's Report, 2007 colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au>

That articles that equate sexualised images of children with harmless dressing up are published is also a major concern. Many parents, educators and community representatives are now feeling quite desperate.

Figures 3.8 and 3.9 are an examples of images cited as evidence in the *Senate Report on the Sexualisation of Children*, 2008.

Dr. Freier's comments (Anglican Media) on the senate inquiry - set up as a result of Rush's report - encapsulates the general sense of hopelessness in the community. He writes that "many parents feel powerless to protect their children from a constant stream of sexualised and violent images in the media ... children become aware of such matters at an early age [and] the result is children obsessing about their body image."

(Still, 2008, para. 2)

Clearly, the retail and advertising industries are concerned about a consumer backlash and David Jones responded by taking legal action. Though consumer law may potentially provide an avenue through which the sexualisation of young women and boys in advertising can be addressed, it is apparent that the retail and advertising industry is fighting back as "It is becoming more common for powerful corporations to sue people who criticised them, which is distorting the democratic system."² (Bone in The Canberra Times, 27/08/07)



Figure 3.10 Chloé Children's Wear: Fall-Winter 2010/2011 Fashion Preview. colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 August 2010 from <http://www.childmode.com/winter-2010-2011-collection.jpg>



Figure 3.11 Chloé Children's Wear: Fall-Winter 2010/2011 Fashion Preview. colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 August 2010 from <http://www.childmode.com/winter-2010-2011-collection.jpg>

² "Section 52, of the Trade Practices Act is there to protect the consumer from misleading or deceptive conduct by the industry. That this section was used to censor advertising practices has "raised eyebrows" as the act until now has only been used for commercial purposes, generally to squash competitors in order to "enhance (company) profits at the expense of a rival rather than (against) non-profit organisations." (Bone, 2007, p.2)

In conclusion, the extent to which objectified, sexualised advertising images of young women and girls influence the formation of identity and gender roles is answered by growing consumer concerns that this is the case and the extent to which advertisers, corporations and government will go to defend their feminine commodities. Figures 3.10, 3.11 and 3.12 are taken from Chloé's Children's wear winter catalogue and demonstrate that the recent debate about sexualised advertising to and using images of children is not declining.

It clearly is not just about profit; cultural power is also at issue.



Figure 3.12 Chloé Children's Wear: Fall-Winter 2010/2011 Fashion Preview. colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 <http://www.childmode.com/winter-2010-2011-collection.jpg>

4. Research Outcomes

4.1 Social and Psychological Parameters

The key to this project is the transformation of persuasive social, psychological, and cultural forces into art works. The intention is that the final works will reveal the layered structure of metaphor by exposing the metaphoric references to gender roles and stereotypes in advertising. New metaphors will be created that make visible the incipient risk to women's health and wellbeing embedded in these consumer images. It is therefore important to ensure that a documented causal link does exist.

To establish this link a survey of social research on the influence of advertising on women's health and wellbeing was done. I also surveyed social networking sites, blogs, and participant posts on women's health sites on the Internet for empirical evidence. The premise that a relationship does exist between the representation of women in advertising and personal concepts of self-worth and self-empowerment was validated by this research.

4.2 Metaphor and Meaning in Contemporary Advertising

Metaphor is usually understood as "a figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity". (Wordnet, 2009). However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) developed the concept that metaphor is not only a language convention but also a conceptual and structural concept, that is a cognitive process by which we interrupt and understand the world and our life experience.

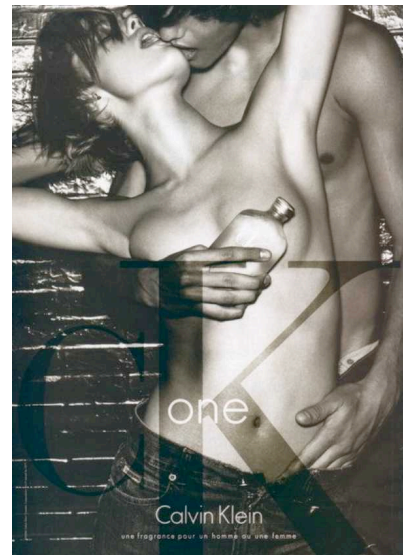


Figure 4.1 An example of metaphor as social structure. Target advertising for young adolescent males and girls. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.mimifroufrou.com/>

See Figure 4.1 illustrates this concept by presenting a stereotypical, rite of passage ritual for adolescent males. The booze and sex are associated with Calvin Klein jeans: a promise of fantasy fulfilment.

Figure 4.2 on the following page is also a sophisticated example of complex metaphoric layering. The image employs cinematic references to a young Clint Eastwood and the spaghetti westerns, circa 1970s. By doing this, this image accesses earlier metaphors and incorporates the values of these films (male dominance, guns, and violence). The objectified portrayal of women in these films as sexually available (and frequently whores) is implicit. The position of the woman, her semi-undressed state, partially exposed body



Figure 4.2 An example of classic, metaphoric layering as a result of historic, cinematic references. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://koreabridge.net/post/gender-advertisements>

and wild hair references sexual availability and compliance. Her compliance is assured by the image of the woman's hand on the man's foot. This is reminiscent of an historic gesture of submission in both occidental and oriental cultures.

The image of the woman contrasts with that of the man and the positioning is important. The man is more fully clad in his white pants and but his genitals are highly visible.¹ Significantly, he is muscled and naked to the waist but faceless. Being faceless he becomes all men and all powerful. This is a frightening figure of male prowess, superiority, and sexual dominance.

For the adolescents and young men that this advertising targets his image is undoubtabley attractive and evocative of understated violence and risk -taking. The long, dark hair of the woman is exotic and her framing is suggestive of a non-white ethnicity and an early romantic era.

Possibly this image could be seen as inherently racist simply by referencing earlier notions of white superiority. Gucci and Calvin Klein are guilty of objectifying and diminishing women.

¹ A friend who has acquaintances in advertising told me that the old joke about socks shoved into pants is actually true. I enjoyed the deflationary value of that image.

This is a clear illustration of metaphor as a structural tool and as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) wrote,

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people ... Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities ... [and] primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature ... And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are ... [and therefore] how we perceive, how we think, and what we do. (pp. 5 – 7)

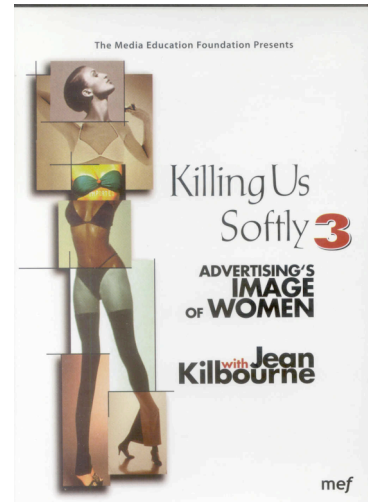


Figure 4.3 The cover image is a graphic representation of the decoding process. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from http://www.mainstreetoshkosh.com/2009_03_01_archive.html

The implication is that a word, an image and an idea can carry historic and contemporary meanings simultaneously, that one metaphor may refer to another and another and another tangentially. Metaphoric structure in advertising may be subtle or in your face but this structuring of our daily lives is present and it does influence our perception of ourselves, our behaviour, and our life experiences.² See Figure 4.4 for an example of metaphoric layering and social structuring which is in essence misogynistic.

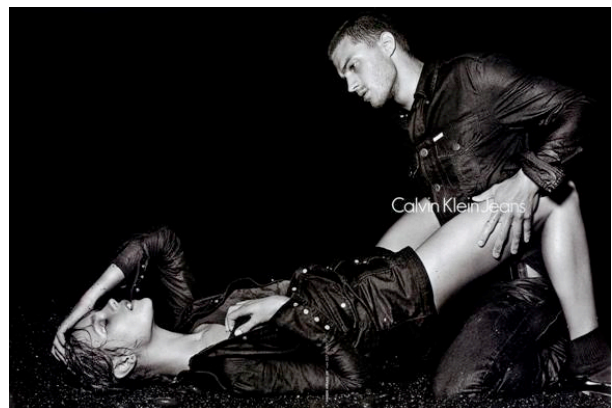


Figure 4.4 An example of advertising that normalises sexual violence, female submission, and promulgates the myth of female sexual pleasure in violence. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from http://blog.lib.umn.edu/raim0007/gwss3307_fall2007/3_gendered_images/

² I first became aware of these concepts in the 1980s (when I was working in disability) while at a conference on psycholinguistics and neurological programming. It was an understanding which I used in remedial language programs with aphasic and cognitively impaired students.

This concept of conceptual, cognitive, and social structuring and its relationship to gender constructions has been a personal interest and concern for many years. It is central to the deconstruction and also the reconstruction of metaphor in my work.

Jean Kilbourne's decoding of metaphor and meaning has been and still is a definitive text on the representation of women in advertising. (Kilbourne, 2006, Video) She has recently republished *Killing Us Softly* and in this "Kilbourne [again] decodes an array of print and television advertisements to reveal a pattern of disturbing and destructive gender stereotypes. Her analysis challenges us to consider the relationship between advertising and broader issues of culture, identity, sexism, and gender violence." (Media Education Foundation, 2006, P)

Figure 4.4 and 4.5 are examples of institutionalised violence against women in lifestyle advertising. In 2009 Calvin Klein and Dolce & Cabbana produced a series of advertisements depicting male violence and simulated rape. For the young male adolescent the message is clear. Wear these clothes and adopt this attitude and you are guaranteed to get "hot chicks" and lots of sex. For young girls, sexual submission and male violence is presented as a normalised, if not desirable, sexual behaviour.

The leather and denim are sadomasochistic references and the images are clearly drawn from pornographic. Figure 4.7 is an example of aspirational advertising – representing upward social mobility. The thin reference is ubiquitous.



Figure 4.5 This simulated rape appeared in print advertising across the globe in 2008 - 2009. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.kibitzhomme.com/?tag=dolce-gabbana>



Figure 4.6 An example of a lifestyle advertisement. Smoking is equated with social status, the perfect body, and sexual desire. The equating of smoking, food and sex (sensuality) is a common strategy in advertising. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/searchframe.php>

Jean Kilbourne's current editions and the videos re-examine the questions and the gender issues discussed in her first edition. I found the thematic sections and her decoding process informative. As Douglas (1995) writes her research has been quoted and validated by a number of contemporary feminist writers since the 1980s. (pp. 321 – 333)



Figure 4.7 The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty (2007) Photograph.

Retrieved 5 May 2008 from http://www.bigmoves.org/images/bigchill1.jpg&imgrefurl=http://nouveauqueer.blogspot.com/2007_06_01archive.html

Kilbourne (2008) has in the last decade collaborated on new research into the influence of advertising on young girls and the media's increasing sexualisation of pre-teens (tweens). In her revised and newer publications she re-engages with the key issues of relating to; the tyranny of beauty, the objectification of women's bodies, the linking of female liberation and weight control, the sexualisation of girls and young women, the infantilising of women and the use of violence to sell products. (P)

Kilbourne's analysis and decoding process is included in a number of media education courses in America but is conspicuously absent from Australian media studies units. However, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* (thinly disguised product advertising) is included in the Victorian Schools media curriculum.

Figure 4.7 shows an image from this campaign. Though the girls represent more realistic body shapes they are still heavily photo-shopped, with flawless complexions and big hair. What is even more surprising is the lack of public concern over Dove's commercial high-jacking of public opinion. As already noted, over the last five years public outrage against the promotion of raunch culture to re-adolescent girls and the use of anorexic and sexualised pre-adolescent girls and young women pictured in advertising has become an issue.³

³ I stumbled across the following post which encapsulates the issues in raunch advertising to very young girls. "Suz Howells of Santa Cruz was unhappy when she had to explain to her then-10-year-old daughter why she couldn't buy a T-shirt with the words "Reeses Peanut Butter Cups" printed across the chest. "I didn't appreciate having to have that discussion" about what the words implied, Howells said. "I was forced to have a conversation about what was suggestive before I wanted to". (Townsend, 2007, P)

The significance of metaphor in advertising resides in the endless potential for layering of meaning. One generally starts, as we do in reading fine art works, by physically describing the image and text. This quick, superficial reading gives us the gist of the sales message.

To summarise Frith et Al (2005), the first reading is generally referred to as “surface meaning” and the sales message (the advertiser’s intended meaning or sales pitch) is referred to as “the strategy behind the ad”. This “strategy” includes a careful weaving of image and text as each informs the other and ensures the intended meaning is assimilated. This is the meaning (product placement) that the advertiser wants the reader to get. It is the most basic of readings. Figures 4.8 – 4.10 are examples of advertising which reinforces cultural, social, and conceptual values and meanings.

A semiotic, thematic, and metaphorical analysis is needed to unpack submerged social and psychological codes in advertising. And all advertising is heavily coded. The understanding that text and imagery is coded enables a perceptive and insightful reading. Advertisers create holistic meaning (stereotypical) and values (happiness and social status) as a strategy to sell their products.



Figure 4.8 A 2009 Lee Jeans ad portraying the girl as a sex object and plaything. The models are probably around fourteen years of age. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.adnunch.org/images>



Figure 4.9 Raunch culture, which sexualises and objectifies young girls? Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://fashionindie.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/eva-mendes-calvin-klein-ad-campaign.jpg>



Figure 4.10 This 2009 Calvin Klein advertisement (with references to “group sex” or “gang bangs”) is particularly brutal. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from www.denimology.com/2009/06/2009_06_CKorgy.jpg

As Jhally (1997) writes,

This holistic approach focuses on how advertising stresses specific visions of society, and on how products are designed to represent happiness for the consumer. Thus each advertisement offers us an idealised vision of our future lifestyle. Advertisers actually sell lifestyles not products. Thus, another way to read ads is to consider the themes that develop in a specific medium, such as a *Vogue* magazine, across a number of issues of that magazine or even across a broad spectrum of multiple magazines. (p. 1)



Figure 4.11 An example of class values and incipient racism – white dominance is implied and sanctioned by the religious iconology of the cross the woman is wearing. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.ltcconline.net/lukas/gender/socialclass/pics/socialclass8.jpg>

Jhally (1998) in his short film *Advertising and the End of the World* offers a number of examples to illustrate how advertising normalises extreme and self-injurious behaviours and equates these attributes with sexuality, availability and an idealised body image (representing the normal in beauty standards). This video can be viewed on line and is a good teaching resource.

Figure 4.12 Vanity Fair covers (2009) are masterpieces of social structuring with their trappings of class and references to social privilege - only the wealthy play polo. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.google.com.au/imgres?imgurl=http://honeysucklechic.files.wordpress.com>



Figures 4.11 and 4.12 illustrate the use of structural values of class, possession and economic privilege.

The result of these metaphors is a conscious, serialised selling of social values and lifestyles rather than products. Of course if we don't buy the product we won't get the desired lifestyle, social status, or personal happiness.

This approach is effective because it normalises the message and images and contrary messages are seen as abnormal. This is particularly true of representational images of women.

Frith (2005) acknowledges Goffman (1979) for his semiotic analysis and understanding of the process by which we assimilate new information. New information is filtered through our personal histories, ethical values and social and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, we interrupt advertising messages in accordance with our own cultural and educational context but this context is not neutral having been already been culturally constructed. In advertising this is referred to as "the cultural or ideological meaning". (p. 5)

To again reference Frith (2005), the advertising industry may argue that they do not create social values, they simply reflect them. This is a chicken and egg argument but it is interesting to note that the more racy or pornographic advertisements are reserved for the print media and the privacy of the reader's home. This suggests that advertisers are concerned about public opinion and billboard exposure is more likely to promote negative comment in the community. Any consideration of this strategy leads one to speculate who leads and who follows.



Figure 4.14 Georgiou Armani, print advertising Italian Vogue 2009. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://classic.feministing.com/archives/014688.html>

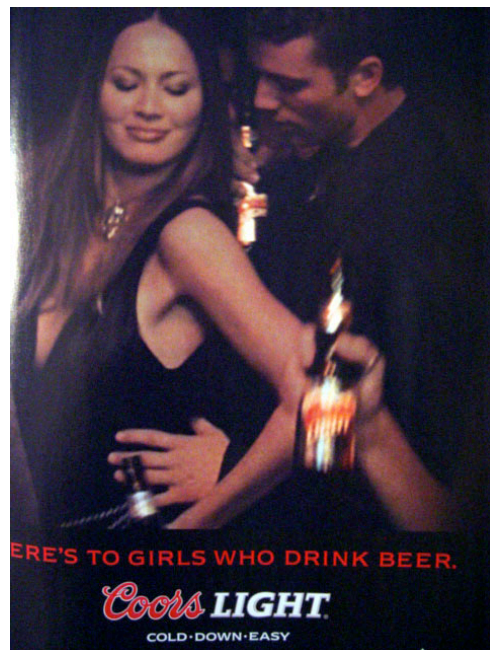


Figure 4.15 Predatory drinking and violent sexual behaviour. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.awfulcommercials.com/archives/category/video/national/coors/>

The jean companies are not so diffident and the Lee and Calvin Klein advertisements shown on the previous pages appeared on billboards across Melbourne and China in 2009.⁴ Advertising for jean companies is notable for its depiction of institutionalised violence against young girls. Sexual objectification of girls is common as are images of male dominance. That the target market is young male adolescents is a concern.

Conversely, even more graphic images have appeared in high end advertising as evinced by Figures 4.14 & 4.15 that equate predatory male behaviour and implied violence as being socially acceptable. These advertisements are again examples of the normalisation of aberrant behaviours.⁵

Advertisements (see Figures 4.16 and 4.17) where women are situated in the landscape or their bodies are presented as landscapes are explicitly disturbing. This type of image is in the tradition of the heroic (male) narrative of conquest and domination – representing concepts of *Forging on into the unknown*, *quelling the native hordes* or *Conquering the highest peak* and *Taming the wilderness*. Then equate it with the female gender. It is not too hard to get the message and in the words of an old cliché, every picture tells a story. Figure 4.17 In this ad the bodies are both in the landscape and of the landscape, the males are the watchers and the women the observed. A proprietary male hand rests on the women's body. Photograph. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.ltcconline.net/lukas/gender/landscape/pics/landscape21.jpg>



Figure 4.16 An example of the female body as a landscape to be conquered. Retrieved 6 March 2009 from <http://www.ltcconline.net/lukas/gender/landscape/pics/landscape5.jpg>



⁴ European Vogue(s), Madison, Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar and Marie Claire.

⁵ I remember speaking with a youngish male – a parent of an adolescent boy – who commented that his son is very confused by the advertising and has been aggressive towards young girls. He commented that it is very difficult to instil appropriate relationship values when the boy is frequently exposed to sexist advertising.

tells a story about our culture, our social and economic structure and entrenched gender roles.

These landscape images were of particular interest to me and they lead me to explore the concept of the urban landscape as a metaphor for social and cultural structuring in my final works for this project. No discussion of the

representation of gender in advertising is complete without Figure 4.18. This illustrates contemporary consumer culture's

obsession with youth and perfect bodies. It is both the cruellest advertisement I found and the most profound.



Figure 4.18 An ageist advertisement from Photo District News for Kiesel camera bags, San Diego, USA 2008 . Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2008 from <http://www.ltcconline.net/lukas/gender/ageism/pics/ageism8.jpg>

4.3 Cross Cultural Comparisons

Currently in China there is a proliferation of women's magazines aimed at young professional women. These magazines are published in Chinese but are generally franchises of international magazines, the most well know of these being Cosmopolitan, Sports Illustrated and Maxim.⁶



Figure 4.19 Images from a photo spread of Zeng Li, which has a *La Femme Nikita* theme in the March issue of *FHM* (男人装) magazine, published by Cosmopolitan. The images suggest sexual violence against women and in this mirror western advertising. Posted by Jeremy Goldkorn, April 4, 2007 11:49 AM

There are also a number of business magazines which display partially clad women on their covers. The exploitation and objectification of Chinese women in advertising now mirrors the practices in the west.⁷ As Galician (2009) writes,

Sexual content in mass media has been around as long as mass media itself ... the difference is the proliferation of it. We live in a 24/7 media world now. Take, as an example, the exploitation of Britney Spears, who is literally pulling off her clothes during her performances. Her real talent lies in being an objectified image. And it is an image, by extension, of our country [America] around the world. (P)

In fact Chinese photography magazines feature semi-clothed or unclothed women on the covers on a monthly basis. This is presented as art for a specialist readership but the covers are prominently displayed on news stands. This is not a practice that we see in the west where such covers are often kept within the shop. This suggests that there is no yet public or community concern about exposure of young children to such images. In

⁶ Sports Illustrated and Maxim are American girlie magazine specialising in soft porn.

⁷ My Chinese students are also obsessed with western and eastern celebrities and celebrity lifestyles. From reading the local papers and watching TV it seems that the cult of the celebrity is as prominent in China as it is in the west. The weekly English oral presentations the students give are predominantly about celebrities, models or movie stars,

the west this would be a significant issue. Figure 4.18 shows a reprehensive, objectified and sexualised female image and Figure 4.19 the new, professional woman.

Economic development and the rise of the numbers of women working professionally has brought with it a rise in social expectations. As Hung & Yiyan Li (2006) note, with “increasing Western influences in China, young Chinese women residing in urban areas have developed an awareness of their new identities as contemporary women distinct from the traditional or revolutionary ideals of the past.” (pp. 7 - 28)⁸ Currently, in China there seems to be no coordinated media watch and so there is no real analysis of the media’s portrayal of women. It is evident from the findings of the media study footnoted below that with only 12% of images featuring strong women that women are still seen as secondary and only in relationship to the male. As Bhargava (2009) writes:

A woman’s goal in life is to attract and attain a man: women are shown in advertising as always young and attractive. They are frequently depicted as sexual objects ... the traditional [roles] have given way gracefully to an alien creature who is [the] new role model ... who has the best of both worlds, is economically independent, progressive, ambitious and very, very feminine. What is being peddled here is grotesque caricatured western lifestyle which is quite far removed from the average ... woman’s struggle to survive, totally negating and never questioning her reality. (p. 1 -3)



Figure 4.18 The March cover of Photographers' Companion (摄影之友), 2007

Posted by Jeremy Goldkorn,
April 4, 2007 11:49 AM



shows a sexualised, amusingly posed young woman. The magazine targets young, educated and professional woman in China.

Posted by pinwei, 2008
www.danwei.org/pinwei.php

⁸ “Abstract: Of the 427 magazine ads examined, over 80% featured one or more images of contemporary Chinese woman: nurturer (8%), strong woman (12%), flower vase (28%), and urban sophisticate (44%). Further, the findings showed specific correlations between the featured images and (1) product categories, (2) magazine type, and (3) presenter ethnicity. Kineta Hung & Stella Yiyan Li, (2006) *Images of the Contemporary Woman in Advertising in China*, School of Business, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, Volume Issue 2, October 2006, pages 7 – 28 Retrieved October, 10, 2009 from <http://www.informaworld.com/>

4.4 Women's Health and Wellbeing

Current research indicates that a direct and documented link exists between advertising, the formation of gender identity and concepts of health and wellbeing. And that this relationship is frequently negative rather than positive.

Crucially young women, young boys and even children are seeking to emulate the perfect gender images postulated by advertising. In our globalised community it is probable that these gender representations are now conceived and constructed by the consumer culture rather than traditional social and patriarchal cultures.

In 2002 the Victorian Government launched its “Women's Health & Wellbeing Strategy” developed by Women's Health Victoria. This project is in two parts and will run for eight years, finishing in 2010. The intention of this strategy is to improve “women's health and wellbeing, with particular attention to the links between gender, diversity, and disadvantage.”⁹ The project was the result of increasing concern from women's health groups that government policies on health and wellbeing were not gender based and therefore were not successfully addressing women's health needs.

The section of this strategy that relates to this project is the research and statistical documentation which confirms that concepts of physical, mental health and wellbeing are gendered and culturally linked.¹⁰

For this project the prevalence of eating disorders and other self-injurious behaviours juxtaposed with the prevalence of thin images in advertising was an important research outcome. Exploring eating disorders through the blogs offered a concrete example of the harm to individual health and wellbeing caused by behavioural responses to cultural representations, consumerism, and advertising images.¹¹ Sadly, In

⁹ “By facilitating the use of gendered data, The Index assists those working in policy development, planning, research and service provision to consider women and gender, resulting in a more detailed picture of Victorian women's lives and better health outcomes for all Victorians.” (p. 5)

¹⁰ The Women's Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2002) notes that, “Health behaviours are gendered ... Various factors including gender roles and socio-economic status, means that behaviours such as dieting, sun exposure, exercise, prescription drug use, and alcohol and tobacco use, differ between women and men ... [in addition] some factors that impact on mental health may be experienced only by women. These include societal and cultural divisions of labour, maternity, social connectedness, depression or other psychological health issues and their causes, such as discrimination, violence, and abuse.” (p. 5)¹⁰

¹¹ Statistics presented by the eating disorder support group, Butterfly Foundation, found one in four children with anorexia in Australia are boys and almost a third of year-nine boys use dangerous

Australia, young women are more likely than young males to evince eating disordered and other self injurious behaviours such as smoking, self mutilation or suicide as a response to social and environmental stressors.¹² In this regard “The Women’s Health & Wellbeing Strategy” and related research established the project’s Australian linkage between women’s health and wellbeing, advertising images and the global nature of consumer culture. I was seeking to valid the social basis of this project and this research did this.¹³

A survey of American and European research elicited similar findings.¹⁴ The New York based American “National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)” website provided comprehensive medical, social, and psychological information on the nature of eating disorders and valuable research links which helped to inform the art work in this project.¹⁵

methods to try and keep thin ... They're involved in that excessive exercise to build up their stamina and that sort of tips them into behaviour patterns which are very, very disordered, and then that tips them into an eating disorder. (MacBean, 2009, P)

- 12 “One in twenty females report having an eating disorder and one in four women report knowing someone who has an eating disorder. Anorexia Nervosa is the third most common illness for adolescent girls in Australia (after obesity and asthma). Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria, 2008, p. 1)
- 13 To paraphrase Wade (2009) in Australia, the prevalence of eating disorders and associated mental health issues for young women aged between 15 – 24 years of age has increased [by 6%] between 1995 and 2005 ... This means that 1 in 12 young women will experience a clinically significant eating disorder at some point and that this will associated with depression. (p. 7)
- 14 “Girls as young as nine are being rushed to hospital seriously ill and the number of young girls admitted to hospital with anorexia has almost doubled in a decade ... (it is a major social issue) that children as young as nine ... are becoming seriously ill by starving themselves almost to death.” (Martin, 2009, p. 2).
- 15 Martin (2009) in his article “Anorexia shock as number of young girls admitted to hospital doubles in a decade” in the UK notes that that incidence of younger re-teen girls, as young as nine, being hospitalised with anorexia as a result of extreme dieting has doubled in the last decade. He has documented research which indicates that the early onset of compulsive, disordered eating patterns is influenced by targeted “tween” advertising and toys, for example Bratz and Barbie Dolls, which is both sexualising childhood and presenting abnormally thin images to both girls and boys. (Para. 8) In Australia there are no centralised research data for pre-teens but it is probable that the prevalence is similar to the incidence in the UK. But we do know that boys as well as girls are now being victimised. The representation of abnormally thin images, dolls, and action toys for boys normalises anorexia and this aspect of advertising is a significant social issue.

It is important to note that young boys as well as girls are now being targeted by advertisers. ABC News Online MacBean (2009) reported that Australia has the highest level of male anorexia in the world, as a result of young boys and young men being targeted by advertisers. (P)¹⁶

This research is supported by The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) (2009) who report that in Australia “research suggests 20–25 per cent of children affected by eating disorders are boys”. (P. 13) (See Figure 4.20)

There is no doubt that our perceptions of body image are predicated on advertising notions of what is and is not attractive for both men and women. To a greater or lesser extent our sense of self-worth is affected by an assessment of our mirrored appearance. How often do we say “*I’m having a bad hair day?*” Unfortunately, young girls and boys may not have the skills or maturity to cope with this consumer generated social pressure. The omnipresence of aspirational images - perfect bodies, social status, gender roles, sexuality and economic prowess – is overwhelming. The research suggests that advertising images can undermine a young person’s self-esteem and “capacity to be self-actualised and emotionally stable.” (Bergstrom et al, 2003, p. 1)

Anecdotally we all know that advertising and consumerism do influence our social values and sense of wellbeing. Keeping up with the Jones’ is a well documented syndrome. How we are perceived by the opposite sex is also important and this changes over time as indicated in Bergstrom et al (2003) who write that in the 1970s and 1980s research indicated that women often “believe men want women to be thinner than men actually report”. However it would seem men’s preferences in body shape has changed over the last decade and “men’s view on the attractiveness of different women was

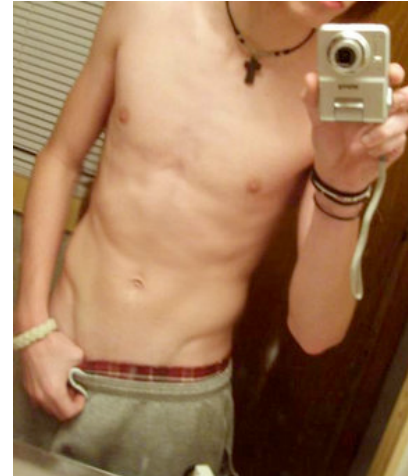


Figure 4.20 Image accompanying article taken from a blog site. ABC News Online's, MacBean (March 23, 2009)

¹⁶ These findings come from a study conducted by psychologists from a North Carolina university involving 4000 men and women from 18 -20 to determine cultural views of attractiveness in the opposite sex. The subjects were shown photographs and asked to rank them. Not surprisingly, the women’s responses varied but males across all age groups had a notably similar response – thin and seductive was preferred. So it is official. It seems that “Men Like Hot, Thin, Seductive Women.” (Uncle Dave, 2006, P)

defined by physical features ... [with] women who looked thin and seductive getting the highest ratings [in the testing].” The representation of thin, sexualised, and objectified women in advertising was considered to be the significant contributor to this shift in male attitudes over the last decade. (Wood, 2003, p. 3)

4.5 Ethnic Comparisons

There is a body of western research which links the growth of targeted advertising and consumerism in ethnic groups in western (and generically in non-western) countries to mental health issues in women. These include anorexia, depression, and suicide in young girls in the 18 - 25 age groups.

These patterns have also been noted in black American, Mexican, African, Indian (sub-continent), and Japanese and Korean women. I was not able to find any direct research on these issues in China. It is probable that such research exists but not in translation.

I did find a joint study of English-language literature references using Medline and Medscape articles, undertaken by Maria Makino in Australia in 2004.¹⁷ Makino compared the incidence of eating disorders in western and non-western countries and found an increase in self-injurious behaviours over the last decade. (Makino et al, 2004, p. 1)

In conclusion, one can reasonably predict that the incidence of health and wellbeing issues for women is increasing in non-western countries in direct proportion to the growth of consumerism. The opening of China as a consumer market in the 1990s for international companies has fashioned a new global paradigm for the cultural representation of women.

¹⁷ The survey found that in Western countries, “the average range for anorexia nervosa was “0.1% to 5.7%” of the population in female subjects and in non-Western countries the average range was “0.46% to 3.2%” in female subjects ... indicating that abnormal eating attitudes in non-Western countries have been gradually increasing.” Makino, Maria 2004, Department of Psychosomatic Medicine, Toho University, Tokyo, Japan, and the Office for Gender and Health, Department of Psychiatry, The University of Melbourne, Australia in 2004

4.6 There Are No Victims Here

Welcome to Pro-Ana, virtual spaces where anorexia is transmuted into a legitimate lifestyle choice with all the intelligence, energy and persuasiveness of a high-powered marketing campaign.

These web sites magically coalesce the best of marketing, motivational psychology, history, women's magazines, celebrity, reality TV and feminist theory into a coherent, albeit subjective, philosophy. Interestingly, they specifically reject the medicalisation of the feminine and promote female self-empowerment, independence and lifestyle choice. This is notable, because contemporary feminist critiques also reject the current re-configuring of the feminine by the medical profession, the pharmaceutical and beauty industry sectors.

However, the meaning and intent of feminist and Pro-Ana advocates is diametrically opposed, though Pro-Ana can promote lifestyle choices that they claim, (not without justification) are culturally sanctioned by contemporary society.

And that is only the beginning. The litany of self-damaging behaviours, anorexia through bulimia, binge eating, self-mutilation, body piecing and tattooing: each has its own portal. Many of these sites incorporate linkages to mainstream health, lifestyle and diet sites as well as ebay, individual blogs on which we can watch starvation or salvation's progress, depending on your point of view, live, 24/7. Ten minutes on Google raises some 877,000 sites.

Yahoo and Hotmail initially hosted these sites, but following public outrage in 2001, new servers, with interesting and edifying names such as *plagueangel* or *projectshapeshift*, now host them. These names tell us a great deal about their target audience. The journey from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most difficult of cultural transitions in western societies and the implied references to tribalism, outcasts and sub-cultural spaces offering unconditional acceptance, intimacy and solace is reassuring. In reality, these virtual sites are also framed by contemporary cultural values and are the most public, not the most intimate of spaces. Current research indicates that adolescent, female users perceive virtual space to be a safe, non-judgemental and private place in which one can try on alternative identities, escape cultural constraints and just be.

These sites are certainly strong on philosophy, cultural mores (nothing tastes as good as thin) and historical research. Arguably the queen of these sites, *Ana's Underground Grotto* (2007) is the most considered example. Here one is introduced to coded language

and terminology such as thinspiration, a personalised philosophy with religious overtones and ritual observances. The quest is angelic perfection, the thinner the better, and Zen Buddhism, Catholicism and Witchcraft offer the historic precedents to make this a culturally sanctioned life choice. Remember, Joan D'Arc and numerous other female saints starved themselves in their quest for power and transformation.¹⁸

To do this requires extraordinary focus, discipline, perseverance and endurance and, to assist one, motivational images referred to as reverse triggers of obese, naked women and girls in grotesque poses juxtapose with stylised starvation imagery of chiselled, frail and hardcore (bones only) images. Even in starvation, style is everything and there is a host of fashion models or celebrities for each style. The analogy is irrefutable.

The various sites offer a range of tips, tricks and techniques to fool your parents, keep on track and stay focused. One wonders if the “you can do anything if you really want to” school of motivational psychology, used extensively in rehabilitation programs for victims of eating disorders, fully appreciates how these strategies are co-opted to reinforce anorexia and a range of eating disorders in virtual space.

Remember this is not a diet, it is a lifestyle and *Pro-Ana* and *Pro-Mia* (pro-bulimia) sites offer a comprehensive marketing package. Management strategies such as effective planning, self-control and buddy systems are discussed. Extensive and current health and drug information, together with links to diet sites and diet effectiveness reviews, are regularly up-dated. Articles are commissioned and written by activists on the nature of marginalisation that draw on history and the women's movement to illustrate historic responses to women who tried to change their cultural status. There are readers' letters and advice columns, particularly on recovery from rehabilitation, fashion and products such as bracelets (the butterfly is popular), the wearing of which enables devotees to recognise each other in real-time, real-world spaces. Cultural icons, yes they have them, write and talk knowledgably about demonisation, censorship, marginalisation, cultural negation, medicalisation and criminalisation of *Pro-Ana* and *Pro-Mia* lifestyles. Metamorphosis, transformation and self-empowerment are recurring themes and phrases served-up in rationalist, religious or alternative philosophies ... we “just wanna see

¹⁸ I call upon Anamadim this night to come to me, make her presence known in my life, and give me success in my efforts to become thin. Invocation- *The Summoning of Anamadim*, 2006, P) Retrieved March, 20, 2006 from <http://ana-gracilis.tripod.com/id4.html>

bones” However, exit, known as ED Ana’s, are not welcome here. “That is just too sick and anyone who wants to die needs help.”¹⁹ (Anas Underground Grotto, 2007, P)

Around about now one starts to feel uncomfortable and the tone of the writing starts to suggest that these are somehow silly females. It all seems very familiar and it is. *Pro-Ana* and *Pro-Mia* sites mimic the standard formula of women and girl’s magazines, TV programs and talk shows. From Vogue to Dolly, content and market mixes remain constant because it works and market research confirms this.

It is easy to be critical, ironic or outraged with *Pro-Ana* and *Mia* lifestyle pronouncements. However, one can be drawn into being critical because the existence of such sites is a constant cultural reminder that struggle for personal and cultural empowerment is a very real part of every female’s daily life. And one may not wish to be reminded of such things.

It can be argued that these sites offer us a microcosm of the culturally sanctioned representation of women and girls in contemporary society and, if they do that, they also offer an insight into the behavioural and political outcome of that cultural sanction.

Contemporary research is consistent in describing the nature, prevalence and triggers for eating disorders.²⁰ It is also consistent in studies relating to the representation of women in advertising and the development of low self-esteem and/or eating disorders. Such studies consistently found that the self-image and confidence of women and young girls was negatively influenced by exposure to thin images. However, each study qualifies this or includes a disclaimer to the effect that only in susceptible subjects was the influence significantly marked or long lasting.

What does this mean? Studies conducted with college students found subjects who were identified in pre-study, psychological testing with low self-esteem responded negatively to thin images. That is a subject of normal weight, or subjects who were marginally overweight, experienced a further loss of self-esteem for a significantly longer period than subjects who were thin on entering the study. The studies were generally conducted over two years.

The research also indicates that subjects who were thin, below normal body weight but not anorexic, exhibited satisfaction, were positively reinforced and elated by

¹⁹ “Exit Anas” are those who are suicidal: literally staving themselves to death.

²⁰ Eating Disorders are classified as: Anorexia, Bulimia, Obesity, Binge Eating and Purging. In addition there are further classifications based on psychological/behavioural factors that include self-mutilation or “cutting”.

exposure to thin images. This is no real critical analysis of this extremely telling response.

The difficulty arises when one considers what susceptible means. Clearly, it relates to low self-esteem, but tells us nothing of how that is acquired and in an image conscious culture that may have been through prior, long-term exposure to thin imagery. It is not possible to find a control group in a westernised, consumer culture which has not been exposed to thin imagery. Unfortunately, these studies side-step contemporary culture's obsession with body image, weight and youth.

Numerous studies of girls and women concur that low-self esteem, a sense of powerlessness and of not being good enough to be socially valued are the key psychological factors in the development of eating disorders. The most recent studies also refute early studies, which classified eating disorders as middle class aberrations and confirm that eating disorders are not particular about economic or social class.

Currently, in Australia, America and Europe it is estimated that one in a hundred (1:100) girls and women are suffering under an eating disorder, of which anorexia is the most prevalent. (Wade et al, 2006, pp. 510-517)

Adolescence is both a time of trying on identities and a time of extreme competition in schools, sports and social groups so it is not surprising that young girls, at this time, are vulnerable to peer group and cultural pressure to conform to accepted, cultural constructs of female identity. Significantly, anorexia is the eating disorder which has the strongest associations with a sense of powerlessness, the need to continually compare oneself with others and find oneself wanting and, therefore, imperfect. Anorexia is a behavioural response, a taking control of the body or quite literally starving for perfection.

According to the Victorian State Government's *Health and Wellbeing Strategy* there appears to have been an increase in the incidence of eating disorders in recent years. This may be partially explained by better reporting procedures in the health professions, but this cannot adequately explain such a dramatic increase.

The increase does, however, exhibit strong, historic correlations with the growth of consumer culture in western societies and this almost symbiotic relationship is specifically evident from 1945 on.

Eating disorders are not new. The first recorded incidence of an eating disorder dates back 2000 years and appears as an addendum in Greek literature. The medical profession was concerned by the prevalence of binge eating and obesity. In the

Hellenistic period and also in India the practice of male hermits renouncing the world for a spiritual asceticism was associated with fasting and starvation and was culturally lauded.

It is interesting that the psychopathology of eating disorders follows discernable economic peaks and troughs. Classical Greece, Rome, the Ottoman Empire, Europe, England and America all experienced a rise in eating disorders when economic prosperity peaked and a decline during economic down turns, recession or war. However, the incidence of eating disorders in non-consumer societies is significantly lower and anorexia, other than for religious asceticism, is non-existent. It is simplistic but fairly self-evident that non-consumer societies do not willingly starve themselves because, when everyone is starving, there are no consumer imperatives to do so. In fact, in many such societies power is associated with body fat and larger women are generally more valued.²¹

The incidence of reported eating disorders rises with the advent of industrial consumer society from 1860, declines dramatically during the first world war, rises again in the 1920s and 1930s with the advent of modernism and again drops away during the second world war.

The emergence of modernism marks the advent of a mass consumer culture and it is from this point onwards that eating disorders become truly democratic. The 1920s and 1930s represent a period of liberation for women: there are educational opportunities, greater economic independence and a growing culture of functionalism, economies of mass production and consumption. Products and magazines now target women, who for the first time are perceived as a lucrative, independent niche market.

There are other discernable facets to this new modernist, consumer culture; female magazines proliferate and they are the avenue along which the mass market travels. It was already evident in 1920 that the new mass culture would be female and that high culture would be male. Images of idealised bodies start to appear; women's underwear is advertised beside new cleaning products. Glamorous women with prams and baby products advertise hairstyles, clothes and home products. From 1945 onwards, with the entry of America into Europe, an exponential growth in American industry occurred. From 1945 onwards, American consumer culture came to be the dominant culture in the

²¹ Contemporary African Culture

west and for the first time the impact of a new industry, advertising as the harbinger of consumer culture, becomes evident.

It can be argued that the advent of advertising and marketing as a specific, specialised industry sector in America from 1945 is perhaps the single most significant factor in the contemporary cultural construction of gender. It is at this point that advertising leaves the pages of magazines and goes truly public.

Though there is a history of outdoor advertising which dates back 2000 years and which rises and falls in prominence with consumerism, it is from 1945 onwards that billboards truly dominate our urban environments and highways due to the rise of the car. Idealised images of women, hundreds of feet tall, dominate cultural centres and the new shopping malls. It is the billboard which appropriates our private space, ingratiates itself into the built environment and promotes an impossible female ideal: youthful, slender, toned, sensual and valued for these qualities.

In contemporary society, it is consumerism which defines this singular aesthetic, and establishes the singular pre-eminence of body image and appearance in women's lives.

5. Shoes are Political

In the final art works I use women's high heeled shoes and the Lotus Shoe as a cultural metaphor for women and the impact of billboard advertising on women's sense of self-esteem and empowerment. I choose to extend this metaphor by referencing the history of high heels in the west and the history of the Lotus Shoe in China. Both shoe histories reflect a cultural tradition of objectification, sexual fetish, and social status.

Social and economic values are reflected in the history of women's shoes in both eastern and western cultures. Thus, from an historic and contemporary perspective, shoes are political, as the type of shoes worn is an immediate visual indicator of social class, political rank and and/or economic status.

Figures 5.1 & 5.2 are illustrative of the political significance of shoes. The styles are separated by 2000 years but are equally non functional, restrictive and symbolic of harmful social practices.

This chapter is a summary only, however, the social significance of shoes has informed the final works, though the project is not about shoes per se. The reference section includes additional source material for those interested in further reading.



Figure 5.1 Red stiletto (13 inch heel), Untitled, 2009, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 10 July 2009 from <http://sharonball.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/red-stiletto-xsmall.jpg>



Figure 5.2 traditional 3 inch Golden Lotus, ca. 1000, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from <http://traditions.culturalchina.com/chinaWH/images/>

5.1 Western Shoes

To paraphrase Anderberg (2005), though shoes may have begun and are still necessary to protect the feet, women have historically had to endure foot wear which is not functional. Foot binding and high heels are classic examples of this. She goes on to discuss the reasons for the evolution of shoes in terms of the discovery of new materials, advances in functionality, technology, design and aesthetics, social and economic status. As Anderberg (2005) writes,

It is assumed that shoes were one of the first things humans made, to protect their feet from hot sand, sharp rocks, etc. while they travelled looking for food ... [and] studies of one Ice Age mummy suggested he did not travel further than 40 miles from home, and his shoes reflected that, both in utility and materials used.” (para. 2)¹

In Europe, the women’s high heel seems to have emerged around 1500, at about the same time as the first male riding boots. It is probable that the 1-1/2 inch (4 cm) heel prevented the rider’s foot from slipping forward in the stirrups. Over the next 100 years a stylised heel for men emerged in France, and by 1600 these had become so narrow and high that they were no longer used for riding.

(Brooke, 1971, para. 6)



Figure 5.3 Gold-trimmed Italian latchet shoes, with inward-curved heels and “super-pointy” toes, ca. 1700-1720, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from <http://www.shoeblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/old-italian-shoes.jpg>

¹ Anderberg (2005) also notes, “there are cultures that are still wearing sandal designs very similar to those worn by their ancient ancestors ... [and] sandals are still the predominant shoe worn in most warm climates ... [The Museum of Natural and Cultural History, University of Oregon, includes a 10,000 year] old pair of sandals, made from sagebrush. [This is illustrative of the historic difference between the commoner and the nobility] as Egyptian sandals dating from the same period show that sandals had class distinctions ... a commoner's sandal was plain, but nobility's sandals had a long curved horn protruding from the toe, much as we see characterizing ‘elf’ shoes today.” (para. 2)

As Anderberg (2005, para. 5) notes, the “laws enacted in Europe during the 16th century indicate that noble women were also wearing high heels from 1500 onwards”.² Records show that Queen Catherine de' Medici, wife of Henry II, King of France, had a pair of heels made for her to give her height (she was short in stature). In the fourteenth century, “Edward III made laws about which fabrics different sectors of society could wear.” And by the end of the fifteen century a range of laws dictated “styles and lengths” for shoes for each of the three classes in England.³



Figure 5.4 Milanese chopines, ca. 1400, batashoemuseum.ca, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from http://www.batashoemuseum.ca/exhibitions/on_a_pedestal/images

During the Renaissance in Venice and France aristocratic women were wearing both chopines and pattens - elevated, walking pedestals 13 inches in height.⁴ Modern platform shoes are similar in design and equally impractical.



Figure 5.5 Patens, ca. early 1900, wood, & metal, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from http://www.batashoemuseum.ca/exhibitions/on_a_pedestal/images

But, “if the utility was to show your social status rather than to walk, then they served their purpose just fine.” (Anderberg, 2005, para. 7) See Figures 5.4 & 5.5

² Anderberg (2005) writes, “Laws were enacted in France ... regulating shoe tip length. Princes, again, could wear 24 inch tips, and gentlemen, 6 inch tips. (I am chuckling thinking of the inherent penis size comparisons these protruding shoe tip lengths must have generated in their time).” (para. 12)

³ “If you were a commoner, your shoes could extend no more than 2 inches past your toes. If you were a merchant, your shoes could not be longer than 6 1/2 inches past your toes. If you were a gentleman, your shoes could extend 12 inches past your toes, and if you were a nobleman, your [pointed] shoes were allowed to extend 24 inches past your toes! (Anderberg, 2005, para. 10)

⁴ “That raised shoes had already been worn as a fashion statement in Italy, at least, is suggested by sumptuary laws in Venice that banned the wearing of *chopine*-style platform shoes as early as the 1430s.” (Anderberg, 2005, para. 12)

The wearing of high heels seems to have been adopted by the European aristocracy quite quickly and probably spread from the French Court.⁵ It is possible that the expression "well-heeled" dates from this time and can be seen as being "synonymous with opulent wealth". It is apparent that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the wearing of heels by the aristocracy was both a "noble fashion" and a symbol of social status, as in "Sienna during the 15th century, it was illegal for anyone other than prostitutes to wear flat shoes or slippers in public". See Figure 5.6 & Figure 5.7 for a contemporary variation on symbolic values. (Anderberg, 2005, p)



Figure 5.6 Contemporary peep toe patent court shoe, £60, Faith. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from <http://fashion.mirror.co.uk/tag/shoes>

Historically, working men and women continued to wear practical shoes though high heeled fashion was adopted by the women of the mercantile class in the eighteenth century and can be seen as socially aspirational. In fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries noble women were to be seen "balancing on all kinds of weird contraptions" at court. In the street they required a gentleman's arm to walk at all. Anderberg (2005) writes,

An elevated "shoe protector" resembling low stilts had women tripping as they tried to walk, and by the 18th century, women were wearing elaborate metal "protectors" for their elegant shoes, to keep them from getting dirty by touching the ground. These shoe protectors give new meaning to the concept of allowing women to stand on their own two feet! (para. 15)

It can be argued that the history of western shoes is a history of social class and also a history of defining cultural norms of femininity. Historically, bare feet, and therefore larger feet, have been associated with peasants and workers. (Anderberg, 2005 para. 16)

⁵ "With the French Revolution drew (sic) near, in the late 1700s, the practice of wearing heels fell into decline in France due to its associations with wealth and aristocracy. Throughout most of the 1800s, flat shoes and sandals were usual for both sexes, but the heel resurfaced in fashion during the late 1800s, almost exclusively among women." (Anderberg, 2005, p. 16)

The children of the wealthy, however, always wore slippers and amongst the western aristocracy, petite women with small feet were more highly valued. This parallels the practice of foot-binding in China. The association of small feet with elites and as a symbol of femininity reached its zenith in the nineteenth century particularly in Victorian England. Small feet are a cultural metaphor for “privilege, and also of weakness and dependence on servants, and a Victorian type of female submission that indicated wealth . . . this feigned weakness and

helpless dependence upon others' servitude are considered very sexy traits in women, even in mainstream American culture today.” Anderberg, 2005, para. 20)

The industrial revolution produced the first, mass produced shoes for the working class, though not the aristocracy, who continued until the 1930s to favour hand-made shoes: an important cultural distinction. Shoe sizes, styles and materials were now standardised. The emergence of a middle class in Europe led to the rapid growth of a consumer market. This meant the shoe quickly became a fashion item as manufacturers needed to compete. By the 1850s most urban workers were able to afford mass-produced shoes. The pointy toe shoe became popular and many women then, as now, have “toes that are crumpled together, with one toe lying upon another, due to pointed toes and raised heels that jam the feet into the pointy toe area”. (Anderberg, 2005, para. 20) See Figure 5.8

The popularity of the high heel for women has continued almost unabated since the 1500s, though there have been periods when it has fallen out of fashion. In the 1960s and 1970s lower heels were preferred, a preference which was influenced by the feminist movements' criticism of heels as



Figure 5.7 a shoes with 13 cm stiletto heels, 2009, catwalkfashion.co.uk, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://www.catwalkfashion.co.uk/images>



Figure 5.8 Killer Heels, 2009, catwalkfashion.co.uk colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://www.catwalkfashion.co.uk/images>

inappropriate on both health and social grounds.

In the 1980s and 1990s high heels returned and currently the ultra high heel is again evident. Changes in fashion also dictate changes in heel shape as well as height. In the 1970s the block heel, wedge or platform heel predominated, while in the 1990s a tapered heel was preferred.

But the most enduring and popular fashion heel of the last fifty years has been the stiletto. Also known as the spike heel, the stiletto was popular in the 1950s, 1980s and post 2000.

Contemporary stiletto heights range from 8cm to 13cm, though ultra high heels should be considered as fetish objects worn for aesthetic rather than functional reasons.⁶ Fashion industry research indicates that women see the stiletto as “elegant and seductive” [and] “stiletto heels have become synonymous with ultimate sexy footwear.”⁷ (See Figure 5.9)

Advertising promises women that high heels will make them more sexually alluring and this is a coded message; sexiness equates to social power. This reflects the reasons women supported, encouraged and maintained foot binding in China.

Today, to be valued sexually by men is to be noticed by men and this is materially and socially advantageous and profitable. And, contrary to popular magazine lore, (or is it misleading hype that women dress for themselves not men?), “it seems that men [do] generally favour high heels in women and specifically stilettos as they push the foot and pelvis forward



Figure 5.9 Ultra Stiletto, Alex Macqueen, 2009, colour photography. Photograph Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://www.kristopherdukes.com/images/Alexander-McQueen-shoes-black-white.gif>

⁶ “Models have been dropping like flies but [we love stilettos]. . . our legs appear longer and slimmer [stilettos] flatten our tummy and make our bottom and breasts protrude. . . Fashionistas opt for Botox injections to save their soles. ‘Toe tucks’ and ‘foot fillers’ are the latest ‘must-have’ in cosmetic surgery, enabling women to endure the stress put on their feet by ‘killer heels’.” *The Rise and Rise of Killer Heels in CELEB BRANDS*. Posted by Stephen S Alison on May 13, 2009. Retrieved from <http://celeb-brands.com/fashion/accessories/the-rise-and-rise-of-killer-heels/>

⁷ Stilettos – The Shoes For Super Sensual Look, June 2009 Look Cheap Shoes Resources para 1 Retrieved from <http://www.nxdq.net/171581-Stilettos-The-Shoes-For-Super-Sensual-Look.html>

requiring the women to walk with a slightly unsteady, sexual swaying of the hips and buttocks.” (Mrunal, 2009, P)⁸

The wearing of high heels is not without health risks. The damage caused by heels is well documented and ranges from the extreme - shortening of the Achilles tendon which requires surgical intervention – to soft tissue damage, blisters, corns, hammer toes and bunions. Figures 5.10 & 5.11 illustrate tissue and nerve damage caused by the wearing of high heels.

An extremely serious condition known as Morton’s neuroma is becoming “more common” and is likened to “walking on a marble.” A neuroma is the formation of fibrous tissue or a tumor around the nerve tissue and results in a burning sensation, numbness, pain and swelling in the ball of the foot when walking. This is caused by the pressure exerted on the ball of the foot and the resultant squeezing of the nerves when wearing high heels.⁹



Figure 5.10 Morton's Neuroma shown in circled area, 2009, Diagram. Photograph, Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>

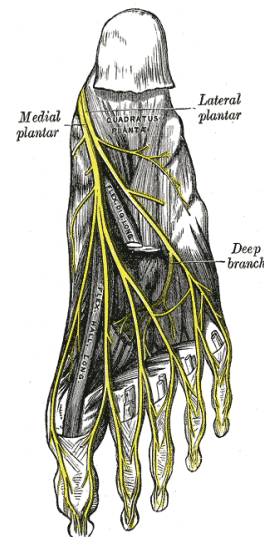


Figure 5.11 Foot and ligaments including nerve damage to the ball of the foot and toes, 2009, diagram. Photograph. Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>

⁸ “Stilettoes change the angle of the foot with respect to the lower leg, which accentuates calves, requiring a more upright carriage and altering the gait in a seductive fashion, the wearer appears taller, the legs appear longer, foot appears smaller, the toes appear shorter, the arches of the feet are higher and better defined, the lower leg muscles are more defined and they the Gluteus Maximus (buttock muscle) more defined ” (Mrunal, 2009, P)

⁹ “Common conditions resulting from the wearing of high heels include; foot deformities, including hammertoes and bunions, an unsteady gait, poor balance, a shorting of the wearer's stride, they can render the wearer unable to run, and may predispose wearer to degenerative changes in the knee joint. Women who wear high heels frequently have a higher incidence of degenerative joint disease of the knees. This is because they cause a decrease in the normal rotation of the foot which puts more rotation stress on the knee.” (American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, 2001, para. 1)

5.2 The Lotus Shoe

There is consensus that foot binding (*chánzú*)¹⁰ was practised in China for around one thousand years.¹¹ (See Figure 5.12)

A number of sources cited date the Lotus shoes from the Western Han Dynasty around 2,200 years ago. The emperor Li Yu of the Southern Tang State is reputed to have ordered a “favourite concubine, Fragrant Girl, to bind her feet with



Figure 5.12 Traditional White Golden Lotus, cloth, hand embroidered, ca 1300, colour photography. Photograph. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from http://www.artsofasiacorp.com/products/misc/Misc7_file/image003.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.artsofasiacorp.com/products/misc/Misc7.htm_

silk bands and dance on a golden lotus platform encrusted with pearls and gems.” (Vento, 1998, p)¹² The Nanjing court openly “celebrated the fame of its dancing girls, renowned for their tiny feet and beautiful bow shoes.” It is clear that at this time foot binding was only practiced by wealthy elite. Levy (1978) writes,

[Foot binding was found] only in the wealthiest parts of China, which suggests that binding the feet of well-born girls represented their freedom from manual labor and, at the same time, the ability of their husbands to afford wives who did not need to work, who existed solely to serve their men and direct household servants while performing no labor themselves. The economic and social attractions of such women may well have translated into sexual desirability among elite men. (p. 12)

Foot binding seems to have spread rapidly and by the 17th century the daughters of both wealthy Han Chinese and rich peasants had bound feet. Levy comments that “as

¹⁰ Pinyin spelling

¹¹ “According to the author of *The Sex Life of the Foot and Shoe*, 40 percent to 50 percent of Chinese women had bound feet in the 19th century. For the upper classes, the figure was almost 100 percent.” (Levy, 1997, p. 2)

¹² This story is disputed by several scholars and, to summarise Levy, there is no significant textual evidence to support this cultural narrative. The first written records of the practice are found in the Southern Tang dynasty, Nanjing in the tenth century. (Vento, Marie (1998) *One Thousand Years of Chinese Footbinding: Its Origins, Popularity and Demise*. Retrieved from academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/.../vento.html

many as 2 billion Chinese women were subjected to this practice, from the late 10th century until 1949, when foot binding was outlawed by the communists.”¹³ (Levy, 1978, p. 12)

The damage to the feet of young girls as result of this practice was extreme and permanent. (See Figures 5.13 & 5.14).

The binding process “involved breaking the arch of the foot, which ultimately left a crevice approximately two inches deep, which was considered most desirable.” (Cumming, 1997, p)¹⁴

The process of breaking and rebinding was continued for a several years until the foot “measured three or three and one-half inches from toe to heel.”

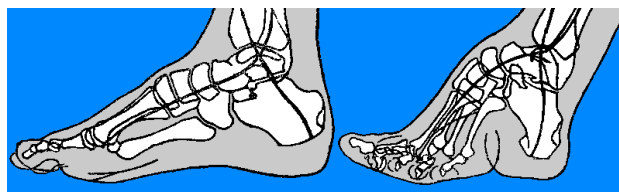


Figure 5.13 X-ray comparison between an unbound and bound foot, 2009, drawing. Photograph. Retrieved 4 March 2009 from <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/>



Figure 5.14: Damage sustained from foot binding ca. 1912 black & white photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from <http://aprovechar.danandsally.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/lotus-shoe-foot.jpg>

¹³ The ethnic Hakka of southern China never practiced “foot binding and had natural feet” as did Manchu women who “were forbidden to bind their feet by an edict from the Emperor after the Manchu started their rule of China in 1644.” (Levy, 1997, p. 1)

¹⁴ In November 1997, UC San Francisco released details of the first study on the consequences of foot binding. In a news release it said: “The UCSF study, part of a larger study of osteoporosis in China, is the first to look at the prevalence and consequences of foot binding, according to lead author Steven R. Cummings, MD, UCSF professor of medicine and epidemiology and biostatistics. UCSF researchers examined a randomly selected sample of 193 women in Beijing (93 at 80 years or older and 100 between 70 and 79 years). They found 38 percent of women in the 80s age group and 18 percent of those in the 70s age group had bound foot deformities. The study shows that women in the 80 years or older group with bound feet were more likely to have fallen during the previous year than women with normal feet (38 percent vs. 19 percent) and were less able to rise from a chair without assistance (43 percent vs. 26 percent). In addition, the study found that women with bound feet had 5.1 percent lower hip bone density and 4.7 percent lower spine bone density than women with normal feet, putting them at greater risk of suffering hip or spine fractures.” (UC Museum, 1997, para. 4)

Walking became painful after binding but “many women with bound feet were able to walk, work in the fields, and climb to mountain homes from valleys below”.¹⁵ (Levy, 1978, p. 16) For the women, the process of making and embroidering the Lotus slippers and wrappings was a matter of great pride and competition and a strong, contemporary women’s Lotus Shoe Craft movement exists in China.¹⁶

The pride in craftsmanship was an important accoutrement in the practice of foot binding, since girls must make and embroider their own shoes and bandages. A skillful embroiderer was seen as genteel and an asset to the family. A girl with natural feet was seen as socially inferior as she has to “rough work ... [the girl does not ride in sedan chairs but] walks in the street, has no red cloth [and] does not eat the best food” (Beverley, 1997 p. 20). The girl who has small feet not only earns a good name for herself but also for her family.

When the last of the lotus footed women were interviewed in China in 2007 they expressed regret at their bound feet but as Zhou Guizhen, 86 said, “at the time, if you didn’t bind your feet, no one would marry you”. (Lim, 2007, p. 2)



Figure 5.15 Louisa Lim, 1997, colour photography. Photograph. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from <http://womensspace.wordpress.com/2008/05/23/shoes-warning-may-trigger/>

¹⁵ “As late as 2005, women with bound feet in one village in Yunnan Province formed an internationally known dancing troupe to perform for foreign tourists. And in other areas, women in their 70s and 80s could be found working in the rice fields well into the 21st century. In the 19th and early 20th century, dancers with bound feet were very popular, as were circus performers who stood on prancing or running horses.”

¹⁶ Bound feet were known by several names but most commonly “Golden Lotus”, “The Three-Inch Golden Lily” and “Perfume Lily”. Each style had its own colours, style, and distinctive embroidery. Collectively they are known as Lotus feet. (Ko, 1997, P)

Louisa Lim, (2007) in her article *Painful Memories for China's Foot binding Survivors*, (See Figures 5.15 & 5.16) tells Wang Lifen's story:

Wang Lifen no longer remembers the pain of breaking her bones, but admits that sometimes her feet still hurt so much she can't even put them down on the ground. Wang Lifen was just 7 years old when her mother started binding her feet: breaking her toes and binding them underneath the sole of the foot with bandages. After her mother died, Wang carried on, breaking the arch of her own foot to force her toes and heel ever closer. Now 79, Wang no longer remembers the pain. "Because I bound my own feet, I could manipulate them more gently until the bones were broken. Young bones are soft, and break more easily," she says. At that time, bound feet were a status symbol, the only way for a woman to marry into money. In Wang's case, her in-laws had demanded the matchmaker find their son a wife with tiny feet. It was only after the wedding, when she finally met her husband for the first time, that she discovered he was an opium addict. (p. 3)



Figure 5.16 Wang Lifen at 79 with her neighbours' toddler, 2007
2009, colour photography. Photograph. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from http://womensspace.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/wang_lifen500.jpg

Small footed women were equated with education, nobility and virginity and this ensured the parents could make a good marriage for the daughter and increase or maintain their social status in the village. As Jackson (1997) notes:

Sometimes, to have a small-foot daughter is a shortcut for a poor family to earn a good deal of money and respect from the affinities . . . [and] the bound feet with bandage save their "foot virginity" and her family is considered noble. They (the girl's family) think small feet are pleasing and will command a high price for a bride." (p. 21)

The posture and walk of a girl with bound feet was considered graceful, elegant and sexual and as Vento (1998) writes, "Chinese men believe that foot binding makes a

woman's vagina narrower and it therefore brings greater pleasant sensation during sexual intercourses.” (p. 3)¹⁷

Foot binding continued in rural areas into the 1930s and the need to manufacture shoes for the Lotus Women continued until 1998, when the last factory was closed in Harbin.¹⁸ See Figure 5.17



Figure 5.17 Western style (leather) lotus shoes, ca. 1912, 1998, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 March 2007 from http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/reflections/winter2008/western_lotus.html

By the beginning of the 20th century, public opinion was changing in China and there is evidence of a growing concern that this practice did not reflect well on China internationally. (Lim, 2007, p. 3)

But, by 1900, foreign missionaries and governments were openly condemning the practice, as were many young Chinese women. The early Chinese feminists began to speak out and as Levy (1997) writes, “At the turn of the 20th century, well-born women

¹⁷ “For Chinese men, bound feet were associated with higher-status love and sex, carrying strong emotions of both modesty and lasciviousness. Bound feet became a sexual fetish and were said to be conducive to better intercourse” [as] the girls’ buttocks and “Jade Gate” are believed to be developed to such a degree that she could grip her husband’s “Jade Spear” more tightly. Therefore, polygamous husbands prefer to give more fertilizing opportunities to the wife who has smaller feet ... [and she] gains more power by having more offspring in the family. [The] “Three-inch golden lotus” is [seen as] a symbol of sex and reproduction [and traditionally by women as social power]. (p. 4)

¹⁸ “BEIJING (Oct. 26) XINHUA — Elderly Chinese women whose feet were bound since childhood to keep them small have fewer shoes to choose from in Harbin, the capital of northeast China’s Heilongjiang Province, because shoe factories no longer produce them, according to a report of Wenhui Bao . . . The last shoe factory to cease mass production of such shoes in Harbin was the Zhiqiang Shoe Factory. It announced on October 20 that it would make the shoes only on a special-order basis. The factory added small shoes for old women to its product range in 1991 to fill a gap in the shoe market, which was cluttered with high-heel shoes for normal feet. In the first two years, more than 2,000 pairs of the [western leather lotus] shoes were sold annually, but now the factory has to think of what to do with [the] tiny pointed shoes, which are not even suitable for babies.” (Special Shoes For Bound-feet Women Now A Thing Of The Past: Chinese Xinhua News Agency, 1998, P)

such as Kwan Siew-Wah, and a pioneer feminist, advocated for the end of foot-binding. Kwan herself refused the foot-binding imposed on her in childhood, so that she could grow normal feet.” (p)

Though a number of previous attempts had been made the communists finally managed to ban the practice. This ban is still in force today.

5.3 Kinky Boots, Foot Fetish, and Pornography

Kinky is a slang term which refers to deviant sexual practices and appears to date from the 1960s. It came into popular usage with the advent of the BBC’s *Avengers* (1995) television series in which the female protagonists wore “calf- to knee-length pull-on black leather boots with 3- to 4-inch heels and pointed toes . . . [and] the series boasted its own song ‘Kinky Boots’ which again became a chart hit in 1990.”¹⁹ (See Figure 5.18)

In the US the idiom “fuck-me boots” used to describe knee high boots became popular in the 1970s. In fashion magazines the expression kinky has endured and now not only high heeled shoes, knee high boots but stilettos and clothing are described in this way.

Today references to sexual fetish are common in fashion but fashion’s specific references to pornography in children’s and adolescent advertising is increasingly being questioned. So we can assume that the references to sadomasochism, prostitution and specifically boot, shoe and foot fetishes are culturally well understood.



Figure 5.18 Sexy, shiny, black, patent leather boots, 2009, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 17 April 2009 from http://www.istockphoto.com/file_thumbview_approve/5456858/2/istockphoto_5456858-sexy-shiny-black-patent-leather-high-heel-stiletto-fetish-boots.jpg

¹⁹ These boots were worn by “Honor Blackman and Diana Rigg (Emma Peel) in the original *Avengers* television series. . . . “Kinky boot beasts”[a parody taken from the series] appeared in “the Sea of Monsters sequence in the 1968 Beatles’ movie *Yellow Submarine*”. (Retrieved 11, January 2008 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinky_Boots_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinky_Boots_(film)))

What is concerning is that these fetishistic, sexually alluring images of young women (and also young men) have become mainstream. In the fashion and retail industry, fetish type clothing and accessories are now the norm. This process of normalisation and the social acceptance of pornography in mainstream culture is disturbing on many levels.²⁰



Figure 5.19 Brooke Shields, aged 12, playing a child prostitute in the film *Pretty Baby*. Photography (Allstar/Cintext/Paramount). Retrieved 14 September 2009 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/18/lost-youth-young-girls/print>

To paraphrase Durham (2009), we seem to be living in a “public culture of sex,” in which adolescent girls and young women are being represented as “sexual fantasy”, thus linking their sexuality to sex work. The media will often refer to little Lolas as a “shorthand term for a “prematurely sexual girl” and young children, adolescents and young women are often seen as “deliberate sexual provocateurs” who entrap adults into relationships which “transgress moral and legal codes.” (P)²¹ (See Figure 5.19 – 5.20)



Figure 5.20 Maddison Gabriel, Gold Coast Fashion Week, 2008, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 2 May 2009 from www.goldcoast.com.au/images/uploadedfiles/editorial/pictures

Not that this is new: historically society has shown different preferences for female body types and cultural representations. However, beginning with Twiggy in the 1960s, global market commodification of youthful sexuality, thinness and girliness has become the norm.

²⁰ “Last Halloween, a five-year-old girl showed up at my doorstep wearing a tube top, miniskirt, platform shoes and eye shadow. The outfit projected a rather tawdry sexuality. “I’m a Bratz!” the tot piped up proudly, a look-alike doll clutched in her chubby fist. I had a dizzying flashback to an image of a child prostitute I had seen in Cambodia, in a disturbingly similar outfit.” (Durham, 2009, P.)

²¹ The appeal of Japanese anime characters has been described as a “the Lolita-like sex appeal” of a preteen (“Tokyo’s Daily Yomiuri”, 2009).

Most fashion models are young (14 to 19 years of age), and despite the fashion industry's resolution to reject anorexic models they seem to have no such qualms about youthful models. Adolescent girls and young women are represented as sexually available and from sexual, even soft pornographic perspectives.

In Queensland in 2007, Maddison Gabriel was the official face of Australia's Gold Coast Fashion Week. She was 13 years old (See figure 5.20). As Chapkis (2009) writes, "A girl at the edge of puberty has a naturally hairless body that demands no shaving, waxing or chemicals . . . her body is naturally small, supple and nothing if not youthful ... the western ideal of female beauty is [now] defined by "eternal youth". (p)

That the global consumer economy is driving this is obvious. Every store, supermarket and online shop carries hundreds of beauty products claiming to keep us youthful. I have no doubt that the targeting of younger and younger girls is a deliberate strategy to make them brand aware and brand loyal as they age. Advertising which "employ[s] the conventions of sex work, legitimising the use of young girls for prostitution and pornography" is now global. (Durham, 2009, para. 7)

In conclusion, in the final works the Lotus Shoes symbolises the harm done by the practice of foot binding in China. They reference sexual fetishes and the diminished social status of women as male chattels. Their social status was always culturally visible since the women were often unable to walk without the support of a male. Nor could they run away, with bound feet. There are equivalent examples of harmful and restrictive footwear associated with class and social status in the history of western shoes.

In the west, social status for males and for females was historically defined by the wearing of heels, an indication that the wearer did not have to work manually. Upper class European women wore light weight slippers with heels indoors and, depending on the fashion, a range of extraordinary high heels and inappropriate external footwear. They, like their eastern sisters, were seen as male property and needed the arm of a gentleman to walk safely in the streets.

Chinese and European women embroidered their own shoes and this needlecraft was historically highly valued by the women themselves. There were designs such as the Lotus Flower in the east and the Rose or Lily in the west which were prized above all

others.²² In both cultures women sustained and promoted a cultural pre-determined role for women.

The stiletto continues to physically damage and deform women's feet, but it is now highly prized as a fashion object in the west and in the east. For this reason the high heel became the ultimate metaphor of persuasion and desire in the final works for this project.

²² The Lotus Shoe and Lotus Foot are named for the Lotus Flower design.

6. The Art Work, Influences and Process

The final art works for this project do not contain images of women. There are some figures in the China works but they are only there incidentally in the cityscapes. The decision to remove figures from my re-imagined, surreal urban environment is a metaphor for dehumanising influence of contemporary consumer culture in both a western and eastern milieu.¹

6.1 Metaphor, Persuasion, and Desire

If we accept that advertising images of women are metaphorically layered with past, present and future cultural meaning, then it is apparent that advertising needs to engage our memory even as it delineates a new cultural representation. Our reading of the visual image as women is dependent on our life experiences and our knowledge of historic, female representations and associated social values. No matter how I de-constructed, re-constructed and re-imagined female representation, the image still spoke to me of metaphor, persuasion, and desire. My concern was that a mutilated advertising image would still trigger a memory of its former, advertising self in the viewer.

I wanted images and installation works in which absence speaks of presence; an alternative perspective on contemporary female representations. Just as I wanted a generic, cultural (urban) context in which the very absence of people and billboards speaks to the viewer of their presence. In this re-imagined, bizarre world I wanted to position a unifying, social metaphor which referenced the negative impact of global consumerism (specially advertising) on contemporary women in China and the west.² After considering women's clothing, fashions, and underwear, I decided on the stiletto and the Lotus shoe as suitable symbols of the power of consumerism. A high heeled shoe is a potent social metaphor which references women's social history, gender, sexuality, cultural values and consumerism.

As previously indicated, I wanted a single unifying, cross cultural symbol to represent the common experiences of women in a global, consumer culture. During this

¹ The use of the term dehumanising refers to the concept of making someone less than human in a psychological context, that is - a denial of individuality and creativity in a person which coexists with the absence of compassion and empathy for others. In this context the girl, boy, women or man becomes "the other" in advertising.

² This references the early discussion on the capacity of media/consumerism to trivialise women's life experiences.

project I have come to think of all women, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or sexual persuasion as part of a global community of women who are equally pressured by consumerism into public personas which have no relationship to the inner person and may be psychologically damaging. I needed to subvert and parody the contemporary advertising message by re-imagining a structural metaphor for persuasion and desire which referenced the inherent cultural harm in objectified, sexualised and pornographic images of young women and girls.

As previous indicated, this metaphor was developed by referencing the history of western shoes and the history of the Lotus Shoe in China. Both histories allude to sexual fetish, culturally objectify and have historically treated women as a social underclass.

My intention is not to criticise either Australian or Chinese culture per se. It is to critique consumer-determined cultural practices and behaviours, in both Australia and China, which cause harm, affect wellbeing and that disempower women.

6.2 The American Women's Art Movement of the 1970s

My interest in and the extent to which the American Women's Art Movement of the 1970s has influenced my art is generic rather than specific and predates this project. I am drawn to the 1970s movement as it is characterised by an engagement with social and political issues, a determination to make art which reflects women's cultural and personal experiences and to make women's art and female artists culturally visible.

The celebration and recognition of women's craft work was also an important part of the movement and my critique of foot binding is not intended to diminish the historic craftsmanship of the women who designed, made, and embroidered the silk lotus shoes. As Kirby (1992) writes,

The Women's Art movement played a significant role not only in opening up new subject matter but in creating new opportunities for artistic expression by breaking down many of the old art/craft distinctions, encouraging women amateurs, questioning the hierarchy of the arts and celebrating craft skills." (p. 6)

As my project is an artistic, cross-cultural response to a contemporary social issue, its antecedents are found in the 1970s feminist movement and explicitly because, as Harpley et al (1977) wrote, "They [the feminist artists] also address overlapping themes such as gender and sexuality; the intersection of racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional identities; and the nature of the relationship between work and viewer." (p. 1)

The making of conceptual, installation art, the blurring of art and design distinctions, found objects in art, the use of irony and parody to critique cultural practices and the importance of the engagement between the viewer and the art work began with the women's movement. The movement was influenced by the writing of John Berger and Marxist analysis as discussed in Chapter 2. Along with experimentation with industrial materials, alternative venues (art moved out of the gallery at this time) and new, emerging computer technology and video, these have become important aspects of post-modern art making. There is no doubt, as Jones (1998) writes, that that we are indebted to feminism as the "insights of feminism provided crucial impetus for the opening up of disciplines which ultimately resulted in the formation of new interdisciplinary strategies of interpretation such as visual culture studies" (p. 3).

My interest in the feminist art movement and feminism generally does relate to my age, though I have only been making art since 1998, but this does not preclude a keen

interest in contemporary art. Nor does a retrospective respect for these artists make my work less relevant. I am aware from discussions with my students that feminism is somehow “not cool” in the contemporary context. I have no real explanation why a fear of feminism has re-emerged at this time. A number of my students have told me that men do not find feminist girls attractive (this concept is frequently expressed in China) and that as women now have the same rights as men it is no longer necessary. I found a plausible answer in Dallow (2003), who writes:

When we address feminism and art in my contemporary art and theory courses, I commonly hear . . . that feminist art and criticism is no longer necessary. In fact, my most homogeneous group of student artists (half men, half women, all white, and from middle-class families) argued that even studying the topic was moot because everything had changed; all was fine between the sexes in our new era of post (or post-post) modernism - an era where everyone's interpretation is allegedly valid, and marginal art and identities are not so marginal anymore. (p. 2)

It is probable that in our current pluralistic, multi-cultural society that women's issues are presented as social, psychological and/or medical, rather than as feminist issues. The need to respect all points of view at all times and in all contexts is problematic as it denies the veracity of a cross-cultural, community of women's interests and values.

There are three feminist artists who have particularly influenced my art work and art process. They are Barbara Kruger, Yoko Ono, and Cindy Sherman. These artists have actively responded to social and gender identity issues in their work over last thirty years. As Jones (1998) writes, “feminism and visual culture share a fundamental concern with how cultural forms inform subjective experience” (p. 1)



Figure 6.1 Barbara Kruger, *Untitled, (I shop therefore I am)*, 1989, colour collage. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.counterfeitchi.com/Images/I%2520shop%2520therefore%2520I%2520am%2520-%2520Barbara%2520Kruger.jpg>

Barbara Kruger has rigorously engaged with social and political issues throughout her career by “exploring the dynamics of power, identity, sexuality and representation.” (Deutsche, 2000, p. 1)

For this project I was specifically interested in her text based installation works and her poster and billboard work with its bold red strips and white text. Kruger was a graphic designer and emulates advertising graphics, slogans/text and image to critique cultural, gender based stereotypes. Figures 6.1 – 6.4 illustrate Kruger's graphic style by parodying the power of consumerism to manipulate behaviours, sense of identity and self-worth and cultural preferencing of youth and beauty (cultural ageism).

My intention was initially to collage found images, my original photographs of billboards and posters, and then scan them. Once in digital format I had planned to experiment with text and irony to parody social messages in advertising.

After experimenting with poster parody and text banners in the early stages of the project I decided to abandon this approach. It was obviously too derivative and lacked the subtle ironically persuasive qualities I was seeking.

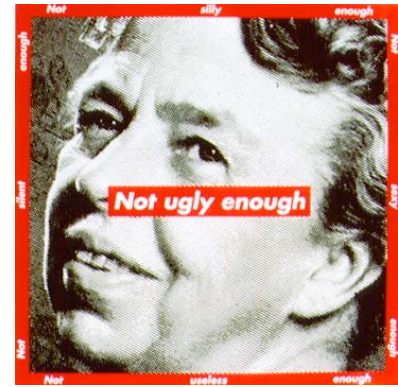


Figure 6.2 *Untitled (Not ugly enough)*, 1997, colour collage. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.tfaoi.com/am/11am/11am298.jpg>

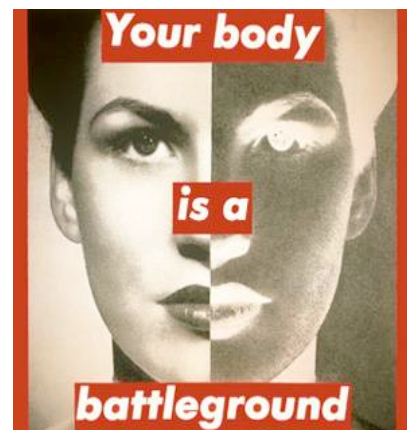


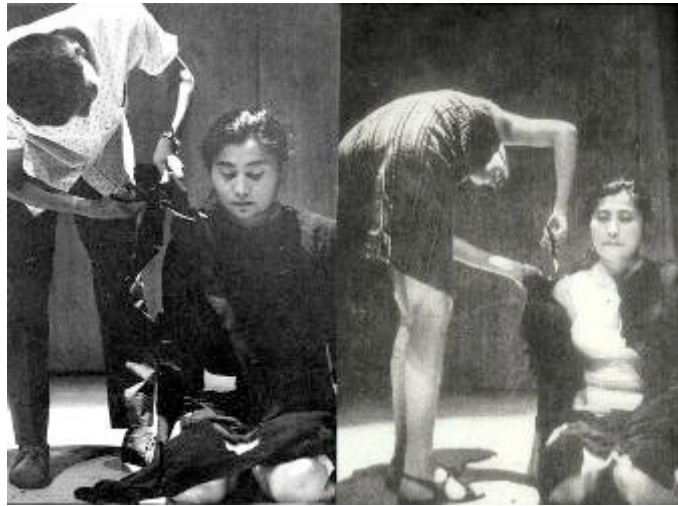
Figure 6.3 *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, 1997 colour collage. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://humanitiesandtheexpressivearts.blogspot.com/&usg>

Figure 6.4 *Power Pleasure Desire Disgust*, 1997, digital colour collage. Photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://peterandjoan.blogs.wm.edu/2009/03/11/barbara-kruger-a-room-with-a-view/>



I was impressed by the conceptual power and visual impact of Kruger's installation work *Power Pleasure Desire Disgust*, 1997 (See Figure 6.4) which was exhibited at ACCA³, Melbourne in 2005 and it confirmed my opinion that digital installation would be viable for this project. Deutsche et al (2000) quote Kruger: "I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't" (p. 1)⁴ This quote succinctly expresses my concerns about the power of advertising to influence young women.

The work of Yoko Ono has always interested me. In her eclectic career she has painted, made music, object art, film, photography and installations. I began as a painter and like many contemporary artists I also like to move across genres. Yoko Ono is an artist who has successfully done this and I find that inspirational.



Figures 6.4 Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964 Yamaichi Hall, Japan, photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://artintelligence.net/review/wp-content/uploads/2008/03/onocutpiece64b.jpg>

Figures 6.4 and 6.5 document the first performance of her *Cut Piece* at Yamaichi Hall, Japan, in 1964⁵ and a third performance twenty-four years later at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2003 when Ono was 70 years old. *Cut Piece*, 2003 is still relevant; it holds up a mirror and asks us to reflect on our social values and attitudes towards women. The performance of a work which is abusive and painfully intimate is saved by the artist's decision to use her own body. Implicit in the personalised power of the piece is the artist's



Figure 6.5 Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece* (2003) Théâtre du Ranelagh, Paris. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://bodytracks.org/2009/10/yoko-ono-cut-piece-theatre-du-ranelagh-paris/>

³ Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)

⁴ Exhibition Catalogue (2003) Whitney Museum of American Art

⁵ *Cut Piece* was also performed at Carnegie Hall, New York, in 1966.

rejection of the objectification and exploitation of women - a context which would not be present if the artist had employed a model for the piece. I admire the quiet dignity and ironic subtleties of her body of work. The longevity of her art and the cultural relevance of this piece, in a contemporary context in which it is cultural suicide for a women to age and to do so in public is inspiring.

I continue to view Ono as a feminist contemporary minimalist artist who can still involve the audience in women's most intimate concerns, feminist issues and cultural politics. She was a founding member of Fluxus and Fluxus's engagement with the media, new technology and bevy of visual, literary musical and performance artists was considered to be too experimental and even quite bizarre at the time. As an artist, Ono's work has retained this edge and has always been intensely personal, political but not didactic and, as an American-Japanese artist, always explored the commonality of women's experience across cultures.

Yoko's pragmatic and functional attitude towards technology is an important influence. Yoko has never mystified or glorified technology. Her interest is in the relationship between technology and people – how do we use it and to what political or social purpose? In the catalog for the recent retrospective of her work *Yes Yoko Ono*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Japan Society Gallery, New York 2003,⁶ Bowen (2003) writes: “[for Yoko] technology is not a particular kind of object (with circuits or electricity or chips), but a relationship between humans, our tools, and our goals. A computer, for instance, can only do what we imagine it ought to. Our imagination is the key.” (P)

My approach to technology, be it digital imaging, video, film, photography or animation, is also functional. My interest in computer generated images and creative media generally is defined by the extent to which the computer is a tool with which to tell stories, explore social issues through art and re-conceptualise cultural context. This is done with the viewers' engagement with the work in mind. In my final works, I wanted the image, the social content and the aesthetic quality to be paramount, not the technology.

⁶ Images from *Yes Yoko Ono*, Originated by Japan Society Gallery, New York 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.mocanomi.org>

One of my favourite works is the *Ceiling Painting (Yes Painting)*, 1966 (Figure 6.6) in which the ‘seekers’ journey up a ladder is rewarded with a compassionate ‘yes.’ As Bowen (2003) writes, “Yet the word can’t be easily read. A magnifying glass hanging

nearby must be used; reminding the viewer that it is their desire to know and see that carried them to this moment of affirmation.” (p. 1)

This piece explores “the nature of the viewer’s gaze by using a word and not an image. This substitution makes the mental nature of vision apparent.” (Bowen, 2003, p. 1)

I have also explored these concepts of substitution; negatives as positives and positives as negatives in my final works, positioning the shoes (cultural mores) in an empty urban (consumer) environment to create a culturally specific context for the viewer to reflect

on. In her film work *Film No. 4, Bottoms* (1966-1967), Yoko explores the nature of imagery and our relationship to it. As Bowen (2003) notes, “We [cultures] make images; only when we forget this do they seem to make us.” (p. 2) The pain invested in imaging ourselves as women is hidden but Yoko seeks to show women’s pain and its culturally determined stereotypes in performance and installation.

Finally, I belatedly discovered that Yoko Ono exhibited a pair of blood-stained stilettos in her exhibition of new work *untitled, touch me*, (2008) Galerie Lelong, Chelsea London. (See Figure 6.8). It was part of an interactive exhibition and finding it felt serendipitous.



Figure 6.6 Yoko Ono, *Ceiling Painting (Yes Painting)*, 1966 Photo by Sheldon C. Collins. Collection of the artist © YOKO ONO. colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/images/bottoms>

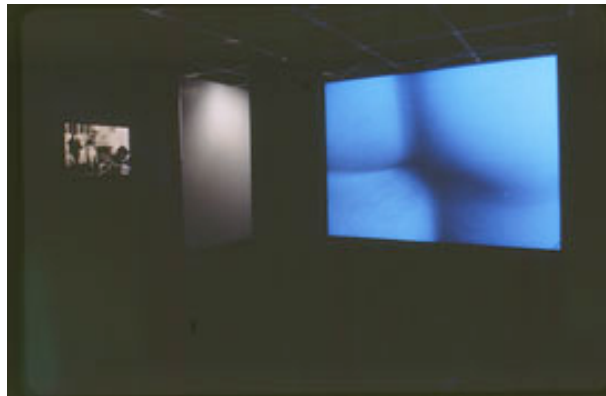


Figure 6.7 *Film No. 4, Bottoms*, 1966-1967, 16mm, b/w, sound, 80 minutes Installation at Japan Society Gallery, New York. Photo by Sheldon C. Collins. Collection of the artist © YOKO ONO. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/images/bottoms>

This exhibition (*touch me*, 2008) also explores our relationship with technology and specifically social networking sites on the web and is, I think, structured to catch the attention of a younger audience. In this it has succeeded, though it is interesting that Marshall (2008, P)⁷ needs to interact technically to be able to draw meaning from the work. The irony of the title *untitled, touch me* and the exploration of the gaze in a cyber context, (we look at ourselves looking at pictures of ourselves) is evident again in this work, but may have got lost on the cyber generation, with their obsession with user generated content, social networking and celebrity culture. (See Figures 6.8 – 6.10 for *untitled, touch me*, 2008).

However, as Marshall (2008) astutely comments on her Chelsea Art Gallerie's blog, there is an interesting parallel between interactive art and the social networking sites on the web, where we are all celebrities.

Marshall (2008) writes:

At the opening I found that I could not connect emotionally, except for one thing – the social aspect – that I can relate to ... in a way, conceptual art – or should I call it “interactive art” where the viewers partake in the creation of the work, as one of her installations at the show did – a big screen with slits in it that people would go behind and stick body parts out while people on the other side took polaroid pictures of the screen



Figure 6.8 *untitled (stilettos) touch me*, 2008, installation. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.imaginepeace.com/touchmeNY08.html>



Figure 6.9 *untitled, touch me*, 2008 Participant photographers looking at their own images, Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from (<http://www.imaginepeace.com/touchme>

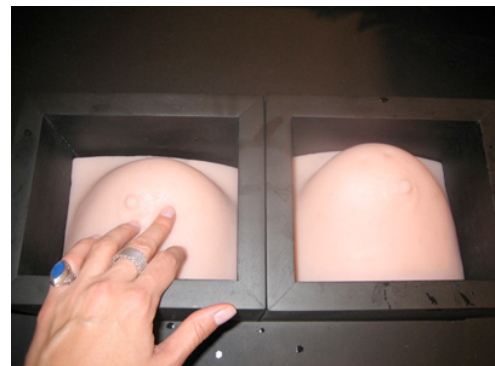


Figure 6.10 *untitled touch me*, 2008, installation. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from (<http://www.imaginepeace.com/touchmeNY08.html>)

⁷ Marshal (2008) writes a weekly blog on the Chelsea fine art scene and galleries for a discerning audience.

– reminded me of User Generated Content. Ha, Yoko Ono doing User Generated Content in a live “Social Network” ... but maybe, just maybe, Social Art, Conceptual Art, is really the precursor of Social Networks and User Generated Content – wouldn’t that be an interesting thesis.” (P)

I am interested that Yoko Ono’s exhibition touch me (2008) included moulded body parts from the human torso. This parallels the dominance of object based sculpture and installation work in China’s contemporary art scene. In Beijing both Chinese and international artists are working with artisans and mould makers in realistic, 3D moulding and casting. I first became interested in object-making in Beijing, though my interest was related to re-presenting found objects (Lotus Shoes) rather than creating hand crafted, sculpture works. Following this, I worked with a mould maker to create a floor installation of moulded, western styled lotus shoes as part of my final installation works.⁸

Cindy Sherman seems to have the capacity to transform herself into multiple stereotypical women from different eras. This transformative quality of her work is not of great interest to me, though I am aware that there is a body of academic writing that regards this as the most important aspect of her work. What interests me, however, is the empathetic quality of the image and the power of her images to evoke cultural memories of other times and other places.⁹ Her photographs are often formatted as landscapes – a visual reflection of their narrative quality.



Figure 6.5 Cindy Sherman, untitled, film still #14, 1978 black & white photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.rachelhulin.com/blog/2008/12/oh-larry-gagosian-oh-youre-on-fire.html>

⁸ I was not aware of Yoko Ono’s most recent object art works so these were not a direct influence, as my decision to work with a mold-maker predates Ono’s exhibition. However, my awareness of them after this date confirmed my decision to display the western lotus shoe facsimiles as a floor piece in conjunction with a projection work.

⁹ “A series of black and white staged film stills portraying female roles in mainstream cinema and film noir. Featuring . . . a collection of femme fatales, cute girls next door, housewives and other

I don't see these images as self portraits but like Meagher (2007) as more complicated narrative interventions, akin to childhood and early adolescent dressing up and trying on of gender roles. Sherman is an actor, presenting a reflected image for our consideration. (P) I think that Sherman is asking the viewer to actively explore their own memories and the social environment and cultural values which have made each of us who we are.

The inherent conflict in each image is the question it poses which relates to the construction of our own memories, experiences and sense of self. Figures 6.11 to 6.13 are illustrative of the evolution of Sherman's metaphoric and narrative style over a thirty year period - I can find her images painful but never unkind. Meagher (2007) contends that Sherman is systematically exploring the concept that our memories are culturally constructed by our experience of family, race, and ethnicity, social and economic class. As Meagher (2007) writes,

The allure of the work, then, is its capacity to 'show the self as an imaginary construct' (Crimp, 1979: 22), to show that 'the self is just a fiction, an image, a role chosen or imposed, invented by you or by society' (P. 14).

I am interested in Sherman's construction of narrative, her use of metaphor and the composition of time and place inherent in each



Figure 6.6 Cindy Sherman, *Cinderella*, 2007, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/shev0018/gwss/sherman>



Figure 6.7 Cindy Sherman, *untitled*, 2007, colour photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2009/12/21/cindy-shermans-studio-is-a-fancy-costume-shop>

clichés. Using methods such as masquerade and self-reflexivity Sherman tackles patriarchal representations of women via two different, but major conduits: the movies and model photography.” (Pilay, 2008, P)

image. This time is not real time, nor is it a real place and the person is not a real person, merely an actor or a doll. The power of the image is in maintaining this reflective distance between subject, photographer and viewer - the meaning is not immediate and often ambiguous. We need to actively interact with the work to understand the image and we can only do this by drawing on memories of real or imagined experiences. As Magrini (2009) writes:

“The net effect is a non-specific characterization that tempts one to speculate about the situation and mood of the female protagonists” (Grundberg 1981). In short, we are sutured into the photographs, drawn in as participants within her single-frame “stories”, and this is why it possible for us to become so genuinely concerned for the women ... [because of] our intense involvement with the fictional scenarios ... as participants [this is] in great part created through our imaginative involvement in Sherman’s art.

(p. 8)

In my installations my images are also constructed narrative images, not film or video stills, nor are they really film or video. They are photographic (film) images which have been de-constructed, re-imagined and re-presented as video or inserted into video pieces. I am influenced particularly by the metaphor, narrative and ambiguity in the works of Yoko Ono. I see these as powerful contextual tools in the construction of meaning and I have endeavoured to use them effectively, in my own way, in my final works.

6.3 Contemporary Australian Creative Media Artists

Three contemporary Australian visual artists have influenced my conceptual approach to this project. They are Susan Norrie, Rosemary Laing, and Tracey Moffatt - each of these artists though aesthetically and stylistically different, makes art in response to social issues from a female perspective. It is these following facets which draws me to their art practice and oeuvre: the reflection of social, political and personal concerns through art; their willingness to experiment with a range of media from photography through digital imaging to object art, the conceptual and thematic unity in their practices; their sense of history and concepts of time in which the past, present and future are often blurred; and the installation basis of their work.

Each of these artists presents the viewer with images which are paradoxical, interactive in that they require a personal and even physical engagement with the work and potentially confronting. For me each of these artists has a definitive social point of view, boldly presented for our consideration. Each is able to weave the visual aesthetics and ideas to create installation works with significant intellectual/conceptual content and visual presence.

As Susan Norrie (2006) writes, “I feel an enormous responsibility to document the truths of our experiences, not just simply erase history and support a collective amnesia”. Norrie is referring to her work *Undertow* (2002) in the Venice Biennale, 2007, but it is equally true of all her works over the last twenty years. (P)

Julianne Engberg (2007) notes in her catalogue essay for the Australian Pavilion, Norrie’s consuming passion is her concern for the environment and this work includes images of “catastrophic events – a toxic forest fire, the ocean besmirched by oil slicks, a city subsumed in an apocalyptic dust cloud, and the choking parade of polluting cars in their slow, poisonous amble across the modern freeway-scope”. (P)

The aesthetics of *Undertow* (2002) and of Norrie’s previous video installation works is an important influence in my work. Norrie is a visual artist and not a documentary film maker so the visual scale, design, physical space and video aesthetic are central to the reading of her installations. As Cininas (2006) notes, Norrie has sourced her material from “the archives of Greenpeace, the Bureau of Meteorology and local television stations, and combined with clips from Russia, Scotland, France, Japan and New Zealand.” (p. 1)

The images and video have been digitally collaged, re-ordered and a non-sequential narrative has been constructed from a variety of disaster footage. The manipulation of

light and colour to give a blue tonality, low resolution, fuzzy focus, the slowing of frame tempo in the completed work, is an important part of the reading of the work, while the audio is a “subdued, hypnotic soundscape [that] throbs through the space like laboured breathing - moody, atmospheric and vaguely dangerous.” (Cininas, 2006, p.2)

Rosemary Laing’s *flight research series* 1998–2000 attracted me because of its theatrical and narrative process. The works are staged, performed, documented, and re-presented as installations. This approach, with the omission of performance elements, is similar to my own process when creating installation works. I find her blurring of reality, fantasy and metaphoric layering interesting. Her brides’ series documents a common “rite of passage experience” for women. Laing (2001) writes:

Flight sits in our consciousness as a kind of fantasy or dream. It is a metaphorical notion. Children dream of flying. It is a very escapist notion to be able to fly. Superheroes fly. Then you’ve got Yves Klein’s *Leap into the void*. I was interested in unfettering the body from the mechanics of flight. (p.3)



Figure 6.9 *flight research* #5 1998. Colour Photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://www.annettelarkin.com/content/art-detail.asp?idImage=25187>



Figure 6.8 *flight research* #1 1999. Colour Photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://nga.gov.au/TALES/detail%20pages/120551.cfm>



Figure 6.10 *flight research* #6 1999. Colour Photography. Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from <http://nga.gov.au/jump/details/134462.cfm>

In these extraordinary images a sense of female empowerment or “flight with no landing; the images remaining forever held in time and space” is evident. (Alexander, 2008, pp.18–23) See Figures 6.14, 6.15 & 6.16

I was attracted to Laing's work by her approach to photography which positions the idea ahead of the image – something which is very important in my final works. Laing is one of only a few conceptual photographers working in Australia for whom the primacy of the image is not the only legitimate outcome for photographic art works.

I also use photography in this way - Laing's reflections on her own work perfectly explains my thoughts on my work: "I understand the necessity of image [but] ... Idea is everything. The image exists in relation to the idea. Beauty is useless. It is endlessly desired and entirely useless."¹⁰ When necessary – exploit beauty – to give the image that which is necessary." (Laing, 2001, pp.18–23)

Tracey Moffat is a photographer for whom I have great respect and is an artist who interested and attracted me long before I became involved in art making. It is her recent work which influenced my approach to this project. Moffat has always explored issues of female sexuality, historic narratives, cultural construction of identity representation and race. Moffat began to integrate references to magazines and illustrations in her work in the late 1990s usually with captioned commentary, which reference the works to advertising captions and text as in Barbara Kruger's work. See Figures 6.18 and 6.19 for examples of portrait and video works.

However, Moffat's investigation into the social issues of the stolen generation in *Invocations* (2000), is a psychodrama performance piece which references early American romantic cinema and



Figure 6.11 Tracey Moffat, Pet Thang #4, 1991, colour photography Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/26/Tracey_Moffatt/76/32724/



Figure 6.12 Tracey Moffat, Laudanum, #5 1998, colour photography Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/26/Tracey_Moffatt/61/32704/

¹⁰ "Composition is crap. When necessary – exploit composition – to trap the gaze of the viewer into the idea. The image must live. It must have a life beyond the problematics of the image itself. The most inspiring image ever made is Nauman's Failing to levitate in the studio. It is everything to do with the crucial paradox of the artist's intention. It reveals that the inherent failure of all images is essential to the process, and, that the images finished along the way never complete the necessary idea". (Laing, 2001, pp.18–23)

her recent work based on the celebrity and the social aspects of the cult of celebrity. As advertising also uses metaphors of celebrity I was interested in these works specifically as outlined in the National Gallery of Australia archive,



Figure 6.13 Tracey Moffat, *Useless*, 1974, colour photography Photograph. Retrieved 1 May 2008 from http://www.medienobservation.lmu.de/artikel/foto/fotoparatext_engl.html

Moffat has retreated from specific locales and subject matter and become more explicitly concerned with fame and celebrity . . . in *Under The Sign of Scorpio* [2005] . . . the artist takes on the persona of famous women born - like the artist - under the zodiac sign of Scorpio [thus] reiterating the artist's ongoing interests in celebrity, alternate personas and constructed realities. (National Gallery of Australia, 2008, pp 1 - 3)

Moffat's more recent film and video works which investigate contemporary social issues relating to the social construction of gender, race and sexuality were an important influence. In the National Gallery of Australia the reviewer writes that in Moffat's short film work:

... the stylistic genre features of experimental cinema - usually including non realist narrative scenarios often shot on sound stages echoing her work in still photography . . . also use sound mixes that reinforce the 'fakeness' of the settings and use well-worn experimental cinema devices such as audio field recordings and low tones to provide atmosphere. ” (NGA 2008, pp 1 - 3)

The experimental and transparent nature of Moffat's process is important in her oeuvre. It is the process which identifies, re-defines, re-constructs and re-presents the metaphors and clichés in the representation of women in the conventions of romantic cinema. This echoes my approach and I also see it as is important for the process to be evident in the final works. My decision to use aspects of experimental cinema in my work was informed in part by Moffat's use of these techniques. The use of low resolution imaging, video collage, animation of re-imagined photographs and poor quality audio recordings (ambient sound) are an appropriate foil for the high tech representation of contemporary media images in advertising.

7. Appropriate Visual Record

As indicated, this project is a social art project and I have approached the art works from the standpoint that the representation and visual portrayal of young women in advertising has been shown to adversely impact on women's health and well being. Specifically, representation in advertising does distort and inhibit the development of a positive sense of self-worth and personal empowerment.

This position does relate to feminist standpoint theories on the cultural construction of gender, but my primary concern and contention is that: the representation of women, the construction of female gender, the blurring of gender and sexuality and the construction of social value is orchestrated and sustained by global consumerism in the contemporary context. Thus, the cross-cultural comparison (China and Australia) is relevant and appropriate when considered in the context of China's emerging economy and the globalisation of consumer culture.

In the art works, I specifically address the concept that the economic structure of consumerism is metaphorically and physically reflected in the structure of our urban environments. In this context, the billboard is treated as a public, social portrait of consumer culture's female gender (and sexual) values. These twin structural components are deconstructed, re-imagined, and then reconstructed as alternative metaphors in a new, surrealistic context.

As previously discussed, the final art works for this project do not contain images of women or even people in a generic sense. The decision to remove women from my images is intended as a metaphor for the dehumanising aspects of contemporary advertising. The decision to remove figures from my re-imagined, surreal urban environment is a metaphor for global influence of contemporary consumer culture in both a western and eastern milieu.¹

In this re-imagined, bizarre world, the stiletto is positioned as a unifying, cross-cultural metaphor for the inappropriate representation of women in contemporary

¹ The use of the term dehumanising refers to the concept of making someone less than human in a psychological context, that is - a denial of individuality and creativity in a person, which coexists with the absence of compassion and empathy for others. In this context the girl, boy, women or man becomes "the other" in advertising.

consumer society.² The female shoe is a potent social metaphor, which references women's social history, sexuality and gender, cultural values and consumerism in eastern and western contexts.

In the final works, it is difficult to visually identify and separate the images into specific western or eastern urban genres. This is deliberate, though it is worthy noting that this ambiguity was also effortless, as the similarity in our urban environments, once you delete historic markers, is extraordinary.

In conclusion, as a social art project my intention is not to express anger or outrage in response to gender representations, but rather to present a body of reflective, metaphorically interactive works to the viewer; an act of female consumer activism.

² I see the capacity of consumerism to trivialise women's cultural experience, for example in slogans such as 'shop till you drop' as a structural part of the social metaphor. It effectively marginalises female activity and endeavour, as in men are seen to do and women just shop.

7.1 Initial Collage and Print Works

a) untitled, botoxification series (2004- 2005)

Figures 7.1 to 7.4 represent initial experimentations with collage and found objects. These images were taken from an Italian Vogue and were a continuation of my working process before commencing this project. I used found images that were cutout, cut-up, reconfigured and collaged. The images were then scanned into the computer and digitally manipulated.

In this series, I explored the symbiotic relationship of text and image in advertising. My intention was to reflect social structuring by creating a 3D effect and by positioning the images as in space by using shadowing.

I was interested in the effectiveness of contrasting the limited palette of the images and the red, banner-like text. The text is a direct reference to graphic design strategies used by Barbara Kruger. The cross is a direct symbol – a rejection of the implicit sexual bondage references in the wrapped woman.

This work references the medicalisation of beauty. The renaming of beauty salons as clinics imparts legitimacy: a cultural stamp of approval. It also reflects the increasing involvement of medical practitioners in the lucrative sale of beauty products and procedures. This series began as an A4 print installation but, on revisiting this work in late 2005, I decided to animate the images – a new direction in my work.



Figure 7a.1 untitled, botoxification series #02, collage scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005



Figure 7a.2 untitled, botoxification series #011, collage, scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005



Figure 7a.3 untitled, botoxification series #010, collage, scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005

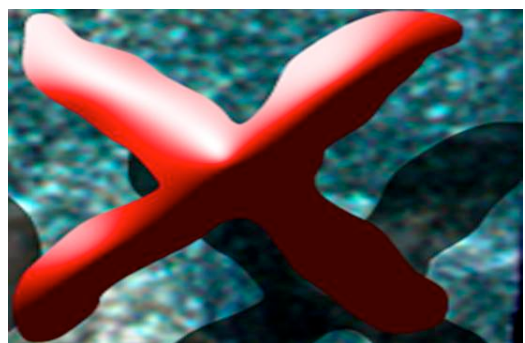


Figure 7a.4 untitled, botoxification series #020, collage, scanned colour image.

b) untitled, built form series 2005

In early 2005, I began walking the streets photographing billboards and advertising posters. Initially, I was interested in deconstructing content, images and the text in advertising and then re-positioning the collaged work in the urban landscape.

I printed my photographs with a view to physically cutting and collaging the photographs and then scanning the photomontage into the computer. At this point, I decided to experiment with digitally deconstructing the images in Photoshop and I began to use the tools of Photoshop as part of the metaphor and meaning in the works.



In these works, I began to reference the landscape as part of the social metaphor. As print installations, the high resolution attained from scanning negatives and/or prints was important.

I began to explore: inverting the social landscape by representing it as a portrait image, varying the size and scale of images, deconstructing and reconstructing the urban landscape, inserting collaged images into billboard frames, distorting images and writing in text slogans across the images.

Figures 7.5 -7.7 are three prints from this series of six works which illustrate this process.

Figure 7b.3 untitled #03, built form series #01, collage, scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005



Figure 7b.1 untitled, built form series #04, collage, scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005



Figure 7b.2 untitled, built form series #02, collage, scanned colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005

c) untitled, persuasion series 2005

It was in this series that I began inserting distorted images of high-heeled shoes into deconstructed and reconstructed photographic montages. I also began to take angled photographs to shift traditional focal and vanishing points. I digitally deconstructed, reconstructed and re-presented these photographs as a photomontage to create an alternative perspective on public advertising.

I began in this series to leave a Photoshop trail in my images. This was a deliberate subversion of the practice of cleaning-up, airbrushing, adjusting colourising, lighting, shadowing and the varying of the tone and quality to produce pristine images in advertising. I stopped chasing stray pixels and began experimenting with pixilated and lower resolution images.

I was, at this time exploring the techniques used in experimental photography and cinema in the 1960s. I became interested in low-tech production values, blurred or unfocused images, low resolution and still photography animations. Using these techniques as a narrative tool interested me and offered an effective counterpoint and metaphor for my cultural interventions.

I also realised at this point that a central metaphor for the cultural construction of female gender/sexuality was needed. The inclusion of deconstructed women in the montages still referenced the original advertising images and the image's cultural values. This series was also produced in black and white for comparison but, though interesting, this did not add to the presence or interpretation of the work. The images in Figures 7.8 to



**Figure 7c.1 untitled, #02
persuasion series 2005, digital
montage, colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005**



**Figure 7c.2 untitled, #02
persuasion series 2005, digital
montage, colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005**



**Figure 7c.3 untitled, #03,
persuasion series #0 2005,
digital montage, colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005**

7.10 illustrate these principles - up to fifteen photographs are digitally collaged for each montage.

7.2 Generic Landscape Compilations

The series *untitled, persuasion series 2005* was my break through series and it introduced me to the concept of using the landscape as a structural metaphor in my imaging. At this point, I was still subverting the traditional billboard by working with portrait formats that also referenced advertising as cultural portraiture.

I began to see the urban environment as symbolic of cultural gender/sexuality constructions, consumerism and the public representation of women. In addition, I realised that including this metaphor in work would strengthen the image. It is at this point that I start to move from deconstruction, reconstruction and re-presenting my images to concepts of deconstruction, reconstruction and re-imagining metaphoric urban contexts in my work.

I now decided to use women's shoes as the central metaphor and while researching the history of women's shoes in European culture I recognised cultural and design similarities with the Lotus Shoe. This led to the decision to incorporate a cross-cultural comparison into the project.

Figures 7.11 and 7.12 are the first of my urban compilations and though not used in the final works shown they illustrate my process from this point forward.

At this point, I started to think of the imaging process as a process of visual intervention and contextual subversion – of meaning and formulated

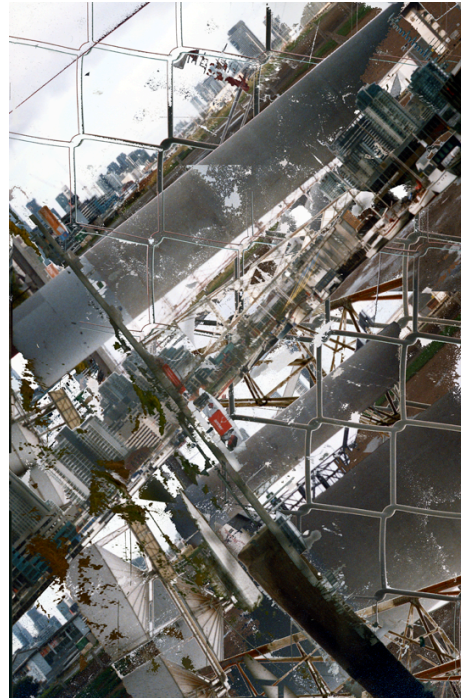


Figure 7:2-1 docklands 7.20am 2006
FW, digital compilation, colour image.
© fredawatkin 2005



Figure 7:2-2 flinders st. station
10.37pm 2006, digital compilation,
colour image. © fredawatkin 2005

a loose set of rules for this intervention. These rules reverse standard, commercial imaging processes and add metaphoric context as the working process becomes visible.

The rules are: take angled photographs; retain the original colour, tonality and light in the photograph; use specific locality clusters in each montage/compilation – no digital enhancement; leave a visible Photoshop trail; leave stray pixels and other blemishes (dust); create multiple vanishing points; distort traditional perspectives; re-imagine images; exclude images of women as this will always reference the original image; reference the history of women's shoes/cultural values, including Lotus Shoes and use the stiletto as the key metaphor.

Figures 7.13 to 7.15 are illustrate the shift in perspective and angles used for the source photography as part of my process from this point forward.

I also began experimenting with angled shots in video works. I shot several experimental videos using the video function on my digital camera. I also shot some video using a video camera that gave me a professional, polished video. On reflection, I realised that this imitated rather than critiqued advertising and I decided to go with the low resolute, fuzz of my camera.



Figure 7:2-3 untitled, 798 0508 4735
Colour photography. © fredawatkin



Figure 7:2-4 untitled, Xidan District 1004 #003. Colour photography.
© fredawatkin 2008



Figure 7:2-5 untitled, 798 0508 4738
Colour photography. © fredawatkin
2008

7.3 Final Works

The final works for this project are installations. They comprise a Field 31 Gallery based installation and a video installation in the adjacent theatre. In the gallery, Field 31 the installation comprises a floor installation, five compilation prints and a video projection.

Though each of the works can stand alone they will be installed as a single installation piece for this exhibition. All the works explore the interconnectedness of advertising, gender representation and consumerism. The implicit metaphoric structuring of social, economic and cultural knowledge and our cognitive awareness of this process conditions our perception of gender images and this relates directly to our health and wellbeing as women.

a) Print Works – metaphor series, 2006 – 2008

Each print is a multi-layered digital compilation based on original photography in China and Melbourne. The Australian images are film based and the China images were shot with a digital (7.5 mega pixel) camera. These works developed out of the compilation urban landscapes I began experimenting with in 2005. The deconstruction, collaging and re-imagining of the urban landscape was done in Photoshop. A Photoshop trail was deliberately left and layers were merged visible and not flattened. The actual process and “process visibility” is central to the reading of the work.

The works are presented as symbolic billboards, hence the landscape presentation, and the deconstructed and re-imaged urban architecture and spaces reference the cultural construction of gender; the contorted, objectified and sexualised representation of women in advertising; the impact of advertising on women’s health and wellbeing and the metaphoric nature of our cognitive processes. It is important to interact with and perceive these images as social/cultural landscapes. They are not cityscapes – the urban environment is a metaphor for cultural structures and consumerism. Each image is a visual critique but this critique is configured as a visual metaphor in a re-structured and re-imaged architectural, social and cultural space.

The central metaphoric image is the stiletto: an image, which carries historic and contemporary meanings and social values for woman. In this series, a single Lotus Shoe print hangs with the stiletto prints; an historic cross-cultural reference and narrative. Significantly, the stiletto is a mass produced consumer object of incredible beauty and power; a gambit of social/sexual/pornographic values, compelling and repellent.

Title: metaphor series, 2006 – 2008 ,

Video Title: shanghai, desire series #3 2009

Print Images: Figures 7.1 to 7.6, untitled, metaphor series

Details: Inkjet prints on fine art paper, irregular size (594 x 791) limited edition.



Figure 7.1 untitled, metaphor series #1



Figure 7.2 untitled, metaphor series #2

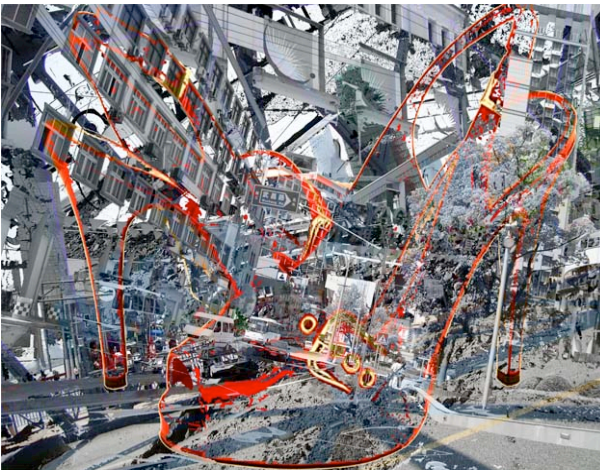


Figure 7.3 untitled, metaphor series #3

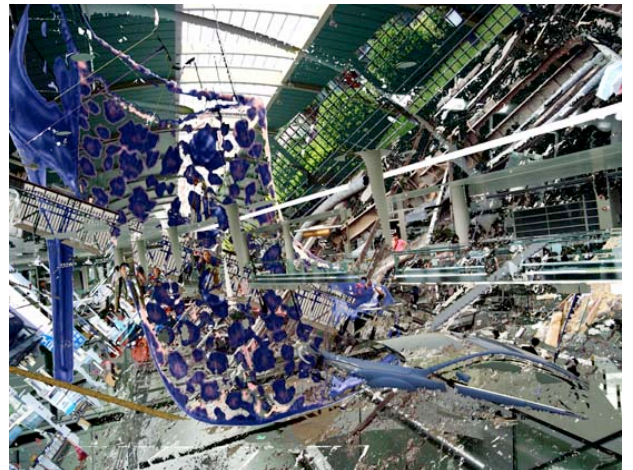


Figure 7.4 untitled, metaphor series #4

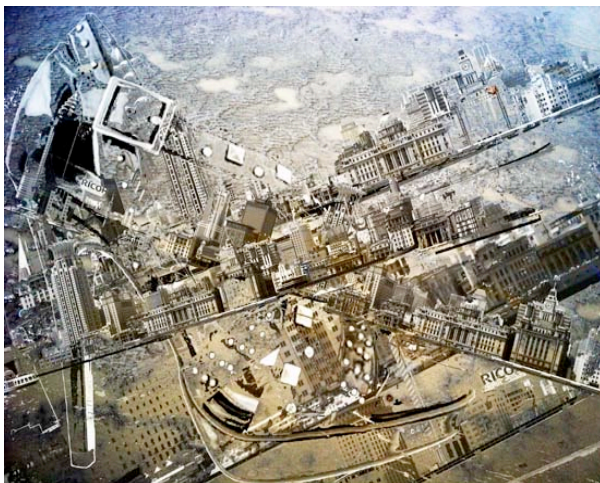


Figure 7.5 untitled, metaphor series #5

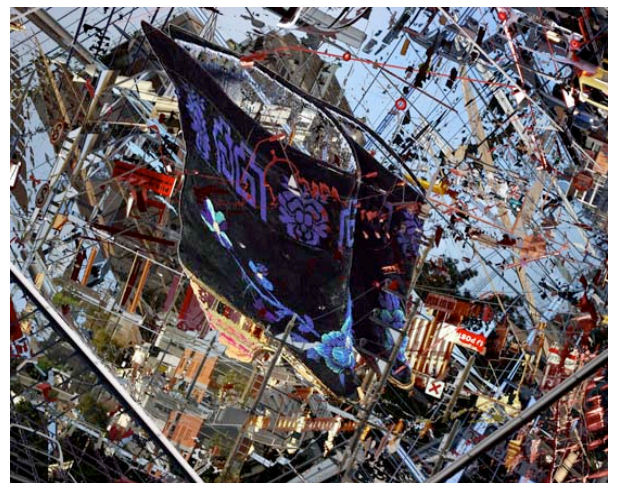


Figure 7.6 untitled, metaphor series #6

7.4 Video Installation Works – China Series

The video installation is comprised of five short video works shown on the wide screen. A shoe stand is positioned to the left, in front of the projection. On the stand are placed several Lotus Shoes, and European Shoe Lasts from the 19th century as well as contemporary stilettos. The shoes are positioned to reference the residual power of the metaphor implicit in exhibiting “shoes as consumer object”. The works are a combination of animated print works, video compilations and low-resolution video taken with my 7.5 mega pixel camera in China. The animation and window editing was done either on the Mac or the laptop PC in China using iMove and Windows Movie Maker.

a) Animation – shanghai ... desire series #3, 2009

The prints in the “metaphor series, 2006 – 2008” were animated to produce this video installation work. The only sound is the sound of silence. Installation details: Size variable, shoes and shoe stand, video/s, 3 minutes duration, looped, silent.

b) china doll ... desire series #2, 2008

This is an animation of digital compilations completed during my Redgate Field 31Gallery Residency, Bai Goa, Beijing in 2008. Australian images were integrated with images from Nanchang and Beijing in these compilations and then animated. Sections of this series were exhibited in the studio on completion of the residency. The audio is a compilation of ambient sounds recorded on the fast train from Nanchang to Beijing. The audio references the historic, cross-cultural journey/s of women, symbolizes the advances wrought by technology in China and is a travel metaphor for the spread of global consumerism. The work is not currently available in print form.

c) summer place ... desire series #4, 2008

This is a video taken, through the window of a taxi, on a return journey to my studio after visiting the (new) Summer Place in Beijing. The central metaphor is the road - represented by the new freeway and a network of five massive ring roads over which I traveled. This is an extension of the travel/journey narrative I explored in the above work. The road/travel represent the growth of global consumerism and the compilations which appear from under the overpasses and on the roads are symbolic billboards through which we glimpse a re-imagined and alternative future for the representation of women. Edited ambient sound from the journey is used on the sound track. The work is not currently available in print form.

Title: china doll, desire series #2, 2008

Print Images: Figures 7.7 to 7.12, untitled, china doll, desire series #2

Details: Digital Compilations, animation, size variable, limited edition



Figure 7.7 untitled, shanghai #1



Figure 7.8 untitled, shanghai #2



Figure 7.9 untitled, shanghai #3

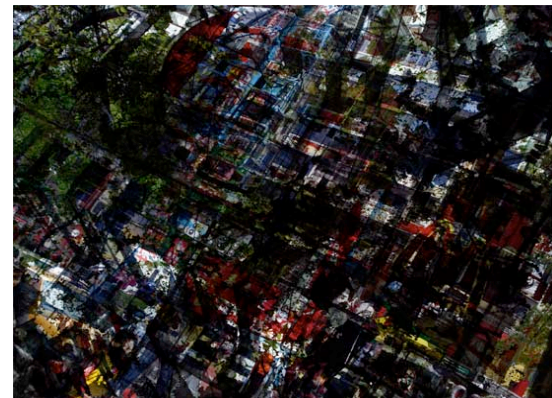


Figure 7.10 untitled, shanghai #4



Figure 7.11 untitled, shanghai #5



Figure 7.12 untitled, shanghai #6

Title: summer place, desire series #4, 2008

Print Images: Figures 7.13 to 7.18, untitled, summer place, desire series #4

Details: Digital Compilations, animation, video, size variable, limited edition



Figure 7.13 untitled, summer place #1



Figure 7.14 untitled, summer place #1



Figure 7.15 untitled, summer place #3



Figure 7.16 untitled, summer place #14



Figure 7.17 untitled, summer place #5



Figure 7.18 untitled, summer place #6

7.5 Video Installation Works – Australian Series

Two video installation pieces will be exhibited from the Australian Series: one work as part of the Field 31, gallery installation and one in the theatre. The gallery work is an early piece, which was particularly success but is in portrait format.

a) shoes, shoes ... , desire series #1 2005

In 2005, I began experimenting with a concept of “spatial inversion” as a form of critique. I was also exploring the concept of referencing the representation of women in advertising to portraiture and female cultural narratives.

This was also when I began exploring the concept of using the “female shoe” as a metaphor for women’s social and cultural history. Thus, introducing the concept of female narratives. While reviewing the European history of women’s shoes, I became aware that shoe design and decoration was being influenced by oriental art (seen as exotic in the 16th century) and the “Lotus Shoe” decoration and needlecraft.

It was apparent that there were “common gender/sex threads” in women’s narratives in the east and west and that juxtaposing the “Lotus Shoe” with western high heels and platform shoes introduced a cross-cultural, feminine narrative that is very powerful. Images of the “Lotus Shoe” and western shoes appear in this work.

This was constructed as a single large-scale compilation for animation. It was then further deconstructed to produce digital slices suitable for animation. Elements of the architectural sculpting of later work are present but understated and it is because of this work that I moved on to the concept of “re-imaged” urban spaces.

The work progresses gradually towards the totality of the final image: in the same way that fragments of a story built to the final narrative. In this work the landscape, the most common billboard format, was subverted by presenting the deconstructed works as a portrait. There is no recorded audio but the video has a sound track – it is the sound of silence. (See video stills p. 114)

b) shoes, desire series #5 2009

This is the most recent work. I decided to create a series of stark, deconstructed stilettos following “Spring Fashion Week 2009” in Paris when ultra-high stilettos were introduced. Images of models falling on the cat-walk, available on You Tube and the general public condemnation and media out-cry have not daunted the designers or manufacturers. These shoes are now available in stores and are selling well. Images of celebrities and other media personalities on TV talk shows, in interviews or in dramas

series tottering about in 17-inch heels have become quite frequent. This was almost too good to be true – metaphorically speaking.

I selected the shoes for this series from Alex McQueen's Spring Collection, 2009 as his designs were the most extreme and had an uncanny resemblance to "Lotus Shoes".

The significance of this animation is the works metaphorical relationship to current, public awareness of gender/sex issues, cultural narratives, near pornographic representations of girls and young women in advertising and the dominance of the consumer culture. This demonstration of the power of the global consumer culture to shape feminine experience and structure our culture, social values and gender/sex roles is extraordinary.

Public condemnation of the absurdity and inappropriateness of these shoes; the recent criticisms of the sexualisation of young children; recent attacks on advertising; the advertiser's objectified, thin and sexualised representation of women and public concerns about health and wellbeing issues (specifically eating disorders and depression) in girls and young women have had no discernable impact. These obscene products are still on the shelves and are still selling worldwide. It would seem that knowledge alone, harm minimisation and public health strategies and the media training offered in schools is not sufficient. Even with this awareness, girls and young women are not changing their behaviours and are being victimised by the consumer culture. Maybe, we need some good old fashioned, feminist "consciousness raising."

Though older, patriarchal structures are still embedded in global consumerism this may be our best chance yet. Consumerism is becoming the dominant culture on a global scale and, consumerism is dependent on selling products and services. If we literally stop buying – consumerism will adapt and the potential for behavioural change and a change in cultural structures and values is possible. This is the reason for this work – it mimics the splendour of advertising while deconstructing culture metaphors and structural meaning. (See video stills p. 115)

7.6 Floor Installation – Art of Metaphor, Persuasion and Desire #1, 2008

This installation is composed of fifty shoes (twenty-five pairs) of molded, latex shoes. The shoes are a copy of the westernized, leather "Lotus Shoe" discussed earlier in the exegesis and which I purchased at an antique market in Beijing. While in China in 2009, I worked with a mold maker to produce a replica and several latex molds. The shoes were then cast in latex. The decision to do this was based on the power of the

“shoe as object” which placed in the context of a gallery undergoes a quantum shift in meaning. The gallery context ensures that the viewer and the shoes as “object” reference the social, cultural and narrative histories of Chinese women and by virtue of it’s western gallery context the commonalities of experience in east and western cultures. The metaphor was strengthened by creating replica, latex shoes which are direct copies of the original and exact in every detail. This “metamorphous” achieved through an industrial and low-tech process is an important part of the meaning of the work as it references China’s economic and technological development.

Like the video works, with their low tech, experimental film references, the “shoes” have their aesthetic origin in banal art, low tech, early “plastics” and found object art. In this exhibition the gallery context is vital: it is transformative. By presenting objects in a new spatial context the layered meanings, content and metaphoric values of the object become evident.

I was influenced by the predominance of “object” art in Chinese contemporary culture but not by a specific artist. I was reminded of the power of the object; it is direct, often confronting and always intriguing. However, without the photographic and digital works, which lead up to this work, I am not sure if I would have seen the metaphoric links and connections.

There are no images of this work – installation shots will be taken and included in the ADV as part of the installation of the project art works.

7.7 Found Object Installation - Art of Metaphor, Persuasion and Desire #3, 2009

The given reasons, comments and discussion on Art of Metaphor, Persuasion and Desire #1, 2008” are relevant to this work. The process of creating latex “replicas” drew me back to the power of the actual “found object”. I realized that the inclusion of an installation of eastern and western shoes in the video installations would act as a metaphoric and literal anchor and reference point for the works.

There are no images of this work – installation shots will be taken and included in the ADV as part of the installation of the project art works.

Title: shoes, shoes ... , desire series #1 2005

Animation Images: Figures 7.14 to 7.19, untitled, digital compilations

Details: Installation, video projection, size variable, duration 5 minutes.

Figure

7.14



Figure

7.15



Figure

7.16



Figure

7.17



Figure

7.18



Figure

7.19



Title: shoes, shoes ... , desire series #5 2009

Animation Images: Figures 7.20 to 7.25, digital compilations

Details: Installation, video projection, size variable, duration 5 minutes.

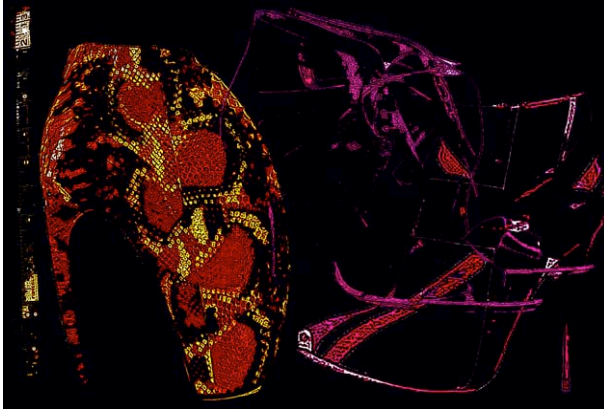


Figure 7.20 shoes, shoes ... #01



Figure 7.21 shoes, shoes ... #02

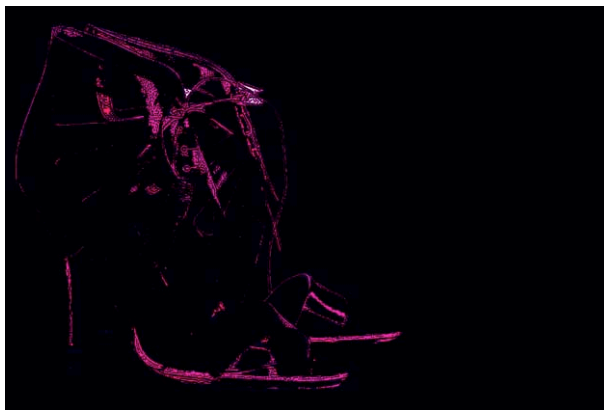


Figure 7.22 shoes, shoes ... #03

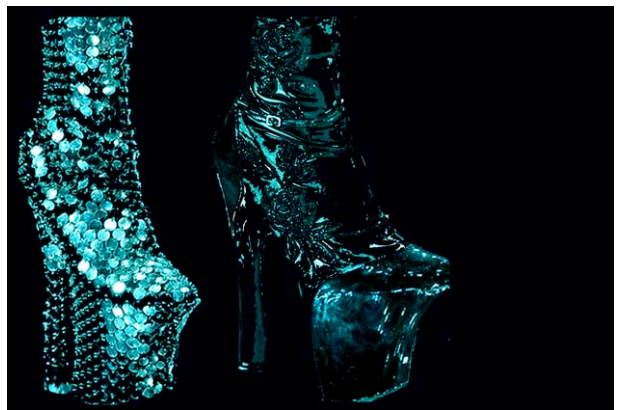


Figure 7.23 shoes, shoes ... #06



Figure 7.24 shoes, shoes ... #15



Figure 7.25 shoes, shoes ... #17

7.8 List of Works – DVD

7.4.1 Prints

Title: metaphor series, 2006 – 2008

Print Images: Figures 7.1 to 7.6, untitled, metaphor series

Details: Inkjet prints on fine art paper, irregular size (594 x 791) limited edition.

7.4. Video – China Series

Title: china doll, desire series #2, 2008

Print Images: Figures 7.7 to 7.13, untitled, china doll, desire series #2

Details: Digital Compilations, animation, size variable, limited edition

Title: shanghai, desire series #3 2009

Animated Print Images: Figures 7.1 to 7.6, untitled, metaphor series

Details: Digital Compilations, animation, size variable, limited edition

Title: summer place, desire series #4, 2008

Print Images: Figures 7.13 to 7., untitled, summer place, desire series #4

Details: Digital Compilations, animation, video, size variable, limited edition

7.4.3 Video – Australian Series

Title: shoes, shoes ... , desire series #1 2005

Video Animation: Figures 7.14 to 7.19, digital compilations

Details: Installation, video projection, size variable, duration 12 minutes

Title: shoes, shoes ... , desire series #5 2009

Animation Images: Figures 7.20 to 7.25, digital compilations

Details: Installation, video projection, size variable, duration 5 minutes.

7.4. Floor installations

Title: Art of Metaphor, Persuasion and Desire #1, 2008

Installation Views: Figures 7.26 to 7.30

Details: Object Art, 25 pairs of latex “westernized Lotus Shoes”, size variable

Title: Art of Metaphor, Persuasion and Desire #1, 2008

Installation Views: Figures 7.26 to 7.30

Details: Object Art, 25 pairs of latex “westernized Lotus Shoes”, size variable

Conclusion

If we accept that advertising images of women are metaphorically layered with past, present, and a future cultural meaning then it is apparent that advertising needs to engage our memory even as it delineates a new cultural representation. Our reading of the visual image as women is dependent on our life experiences and our knowledge of the historic, female representations and associated social values. No matter how I de-constructed, re-constructed and re-imagined female representation, the image still spoke to me of metaphor, persuasion, and desire. My concern was that a mutilated image would still trigger a memory of its former, advertising self in the viewer.

I wanted images and installation works in which absence speaks of presence an alternative perspective on contemporary female representations. Just as I wanted a generic, cultural (urban) context in which the very absence of people and billboards speaks to the viewer of their presence. In this re-imagined, bizarre world I wanted to position a unifying social metaphor which referenced the negative impact of global consumerism (advertising) on contemporary women in China and the west.¹ After considering women's clothing, fashions and underwear I decided on the stiletto and the Lotus shoe as suitable symbols of the power of consumerism. We know the harm these shoes do but . . . A high heeled shoe is a potent social metaphor which references women's social history, sexuality, cultural values, and consumerism.

As indicated, I wanted a single unifying, cross cultural symbol to represent the common experiences of women in a global, consumer culture. During this project I have come to think of all women irrespective of race, ethnicity, or sexual persuasion as part of a global community of women who are equally pressured by consumerism into public personas which have no relationship to the inner person and may be psychologically damaging. I needed to subvert and parody the contemporary advertising message by re-imagining a structural metaphor for persuasion and desire which referenced the inherent cultural harm in objectified sexualised and pornographic images of young women and girls.

As previous indicated, this metaphor was developed by referencing the history of western shoes and the history of the Lotus Shoe in China. Both histories allude to sexual fetish, culturally objectify women, and have historically treated them as a social underclass.

¹ I see the capacity of consumerism to trivialise women's cultural experience. For example slogans such as 'shop till you drop' are a structural part of a social metaphor which effectively marginalises female activity and endeavor by emphasising that men do and women shop.

My intention is not to criticise either Australian or Chinese culture per se. It is to critique consumer determined cultural practices and behaviours, in both Australia and China, which cause harm, affect wellbeing, and disempower women.

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